The Necessary Man

Agnes Logan

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BY

AGNES LOGAN

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CHAPTER I

The Brocklebanks of Bentley in Bedfordshire had farmed the soil of Bentley for three generations when Sanderson Brocklebank was born. The first Brocklebank of Bentley (Robert) had been a tenant farmer, and he had done very well in pigs. No one who moved in the pig world of the eighteen forties was ignorant of the fame of Brocklebank's Bedfordshires. The man was a genius with pigs. He bought his farm and paid well for it, because he could afford it, and because he knew that his landlord, the Duke, would be glad of the money. That was the way of the first Robert Brocklebank. He dealt with the pigs in the matter of food and accommodation with the same open-handed generosity he used toward the Duke in the matter of payment, and incidentally toward himself in all things—even during "the hungry forties."

He died in an attack of gout (perhaps deserved) in 1861, and left the farm and the pigs and sundry responsibilities to his son Arthur, then aged twenty-seven, and married. In this year the second Robert was born.

Arthur had seen the way of his father, where it led,

and he had no intention of traveling the same road. He was careful in the matter of expenditure, so careful that Brocklebank's Bedfordshires waned both in real worth and in popularity. He was careful in the matter of labor. In 1880, the great blow fell: swine fever broke out on the farm, and the breed of Brocklebank's Bedfordshires perished in its home, and perished elsewhere too, because a rumor grew that Brocklebank's Bedfordshires were especially susceptible to swine fever; and although the rumor was false, it could not be contradicted.

Young Robert turned nineteen on the day of the great slaughter when the pigs he had helped to tend were brought forth and slain, and he suffered greatly. Being a son of his father he helped in the work, until old Martha was brought out for execution,—dear fierce old Martha, the mother of many, old Martha, whom he had fed ever since he left school,—then, being the grandson of Robert, he had burst into a generous fit of weeping and had hidden himself in the little barn.

There, when red fire illumined the dusk, and the pungent smell of burning swine's flesh filled all the air, Arthur found him.

Young Robert saw his father standing for a moment in the doorway, black with the red dusk about him, and he noticed that he stooped like an old man.

"Bob," said Arthur.

"Yes, Dad." Robert sprang up.

"Mother wants you."

There was a weariness in his father's voice that cut

Bob to the heart. He felt he had shirked too. He flung a long strong arm over Arthur's shoulder.

"Eh, Dad!" he exclaimed.

Arthur Brocklebank looked out into the glowing, sickening dusk. "We're ruined, lad," he said simply.

At that moment it seemed that Bob's manhood descended suddenly upon him. He pressed his father's shoulder. "Lor'," he said, "don't you talk so silly, Dad! There's other things that ain't pigs."

"Not on this farm."

"Don't talk so silly," he repeated. "I know there is."

"There ain't."

"There is."

"We ain't got no money to stock, lad. We'll have to sell out."

"Sell out!" he exclaimed. "I know we won't. I *know* we won't do that, then. We'll borrow."

"Don't like to think of borrowing, lad. I won't do it. There's no luck about the place nohow, never has been since your granddad died. We'd never pay it back. It'd kill me to be in debt. There's been one slice of bad luck and then another. We've touched unlucky ever since your granddad was took—and now this. It caps the lot, this does. It's the end."

"Don't you talk so silly," said Bob again. And then, tingling with nervousness, he added, "Shall I tell you what Mr. Lee told me?"

"What did he tell you?"

"Said if you'd be better to your farm, same as Grandfather was, the farm'd be better to you."

"Ho!" Arthur exclaimed. "He said that to you, did he? A lot he knows about it. He can talk, he can—he's got the money to spend, and he can do it. He can afford all the labor he wants, and put down fifty load of muck here, and fifty there, and never feel it, and he can buy all these new patent mucks they bring out for the land if he's a mind to. (Not as *I* want their dainty stuff! Give me the good wholesome muck the Lord meant for the land, not that rubbishing powder.) And he'll fetch a chemist out from London to *analyze* his land—*analyze* it!" Arthur laughed bitterly. "Lee's one of those can chuck pounds about wherever he's a mind, and don't feel it. He's a fine one to talk to the like of us."

Robert felt his body prickling as he nerved himself to speak, for he never expressed himself easily, and the subject was tender, naturally. He said, "Lee only lives out of his farm, Dad. That brings him all he's got."

Arthur turned sharply and looked at his son. "You talk to me as if I'd got the money and wouldn't spend it!" he exclaimed. "A fat lot *you* know, don't yer? It's a fine night you choose to tell me to start spending money, ain't it?" Arthur strode off into the pungent dusk and left his son standing in the barn doorway. He stood there for some time before he remembered that his mother had sent a message.

He found her and his sister Winifred (aged seventeen) in the farm kitchen. They wanted him to eat—tea or supper, or some meal unnamed by time. They

were brave, these two. All day they had faced calamity calmly, and in the evening they had prepared a good meal. If they had not been feeling very tender toward their men they would have been angry that the good meal (well thought out and well cooked) had been left so long to spoil.

They were glad to see Robert and said nothing about his lateness. His mother cut him a plate of beef, underdone as he liked it. He ate without speaking. Arthur Brocklebank did not appear. His wife watched the door; once or twice she opened it and stood listening. Rain began to fall, fine and misty at first, but turning later into a real downpour.

"I *wish* Dad would come," she broke out at last.

"Shall I go and see if I can find him?" said Bob's sister, and Bob gathered up his coltish limbs from under the table.

"S'think you won't," he said, and strode out-of-doors.

Robert found his father leaning over a gate gazing into the darkness.

"Ain't yer coming in, Dad?" he asked.

"What time is it?"

"I didn't think to notice. That don't 'alf rain."

"Rain? Does it? Ah, so it does."

They went together to the house.

Arthur Brocklebank dragged himself about the desolate farm for another week, and then he developed pneumonia and died.

So at the age of nineteen the second Robert Brockle-

bank began to reign at Bentley. His mother wished to sell the farm at once. The idea that Bob (to her a mere child) could succeed where his father, her husband, had failed, never once crossed her mind. The farm belonged to Bob certainly, but he was a minor. Immediately after the reading of the will she began to talk to the lawyer about the sale, taking it for granted.

The fact that the farm was not sold speaks eloquently for the strength of Bob's character. Mrs. Brocklebank began her widow's life in a sort of despair that was past fear. She *knew* Bob would throw away all that remained to them. She just waited for the thing to happen.

His first act was to go to the richest and most extravagant farmer in the district, Simon Lee, and ask for the help of his advice for impoverished Bentley. Mrs. Brocklebank wept herself sick over this move of utter madness.

"You'll have us bankrupt," she told him. "We've got no money like Mr. Lee. Your poor father will turn in his grave. You don't know what you're doing."

"Lee does," said Robert. "*Lee* knows all right." His mother's tears hurt him badly. For her sake he would have done without Mr. Lee's advice if he had dared.

Even Winnie gave her voice against him. "I'm real glad you stuck out about the farm, Bob," she said to him, "but I do think you didn't ought to go to Mr. Lee, upsetting Mother like this."

"You mind your own business, Win," he said; "I'm minding mine."

"It's all very well," said Winnie. "You're out all day, you don't have to put up with it with Mother same as I do. I'm with her ding-dong, ding-dong, all day. It'll kill her, or it'll drive me off it—straight—if you keep going on."

Bob looked at the situation in a new light. "Poor old Win!" he said. "Poor old Mother! But it'll be all right. You'll see. Lee says in about two years' time we ought to be round the corner. But I've got an idea. Say, Win, would you like cows to see after—milk and do?"

"Cows? Milk? Me?"

"Yes. Lee was telling me up in the north the women do all the milking. And I'm certain there's a good call round here for a dairy farm. So's Lee, if you ask me quietly. It would take you out of the house a bit, and you'd earn good money, for I'd pay you right. I don't believe it's no use at all having pigs on Bentley. They've had the fever out at Barton now, where we sold ten gilts in the spring. Don't suppose it's our pigs more than theirs, but there you are. I'll talk to Lee to-morrow."

And talk he did, to the tune of a mortgage on Bentley. Mrs. Brocklebank did not really understand what a mortgage was. She had a feeling that it was a sort of bankruptcy, a sin and a disgrace, something to be spoken of in a whisper, a calamity only just short of a crime. She was bewildered when she found that life

still went on, that puddings and blankets were still possible. She began, grudgingly, to have a secret respect for her son, though she did not cease to lament to Winnie.

"I don't know *what* Bob's doing; I simply don't know what Bob's doing. He keeps on spending money like this, and there's this awful mortgage, and we're going on just as if nothing had happened. It would *kill* your poor father if he knew. *I* don't know."

In seven years the mortgage was paid off, and Bentley was free. It prospered as a dairy farm. Mrs. Brocklebank was prouder of her son than she felt was quite decent to the memory of his father. She often told him that it was his luck—he must have his granddad's luck—if only his poor dear father had had half his luck—and so forth.

"He's bound to have his granddad's luck, Missis," said one of the old workmen to her. "He's got his granddad's way. He's the very spit of old Bob."

Winnie was married; Bob had given her his blessing and two of his best cows. In the summer of 1888, Bob fell in love. He was twenty-seven. For some time, and especially since Winnie's marriage, he had looked upon himself as a confirmed bachelor. His mother always hoped that he would marry; she wanted him to have a son to carry on his father's name. Moreover, she was in constant fear that Bob would be left alone "if anything should happen" to her. She had developed a valvular trouble of the heart.

But she wanted the right sort of woman for her

wonderful son—it was not just any girl who would do. Since Winnie had left home Bob had been his mother's world, and people were fond of saying that if he ever did marry his wife would get a tough time of it with the old lady.

They were absolutely mistaken. When Bob brought Nellie Sanderson to see his mother the old lady opened her arms and her heart and took the girl right in. Nellie was fresh complexioned, tall and bonny, deep in the chest, broad on the hips, with laughter in her eyes and on her full sweet mouth. She had strong hands, large and capable. If Mrs. Brocklebank had had the choosing of a mate for her son she would have chosen Nellie. So the parish was disappointed in its expectation of seeing Bob's wife broken on his mother's wheel.

But the position of both women was difficult after the marriage. Bob's mother had been mistress of Bentley, and had held the household purse for over twenty-eight years. It was hard to see her place taken by a young thing of no experience, whose laughing eyes saw humor in every mishap, even when crockery was broken, who laughed uproariously at the very way the geese walked, at the large and dignified mustache worn by Pinto the horse, at the propensity of Clover Flower to kick her milker, even when that milker happened to be the wonderful and almost sacred Bob. It was hard to see Bob giving his affection to this young thing, although it would have distressed her almost infinitely more had he not done so. But, oh, it was

good to see Bob become a boy again in his happiness and his love, it was good to hear him laughing about the place! There was more laughter at Bentley in any one day than there had been in a stretch of years before Bob's marriage. Nellie was rather silly, she thought, but she made Bob happy, so that was all right.

And Nellie was happy too. There was just one thing she found unbearable, and that was the ostentation with which Bob's mother deferred to her in everyday matters. Even if it was only a question whether half a dozen or a dozen pounds of sugar should be ordered Mrs. Brocklebank, with melancholy emphasis, would defer, the visiting grocer meanwhile standing expectant, with well licked pencil, in the doorway.

"*You* must give the orders, my dear," she would say. "You're mistress here now. My day's over." And then she would sigh.

"Don't you talk so stupid, Mother," Nellie would say. "We won't have no sugar at all if you blow that way. Lor'! That'd make you and Bob look down noses (wouldn't it?) if you didn't have no sugar in yer tea? And *you* needn't look old at me neither," she would say to the grocer. "You take your orders from Mother, me lad, if you want any."

"Well, I should think half a dozen would do this time, wouldn't you?" asked Mrs. Brocklebank.

"Just as you like," Nellie answered. "We must remember we're got those damsons to jam, but——"

"Ah! We'll have a dozen then, Mr. Westrop."

So the grocer would take his order from the old lady, and put his pencil behind his ear, his book in his pocket, and depart. All the same the ruling at house passed imperceptibly yet surely into Nellie's very capable hands, so surely that Mrs. Brocklebank ceased insisting upon a fact that was evident. Nellie was mistress at Bentley. There was no rupture between the two women who loved Robert Brocklebank.

In September, 1890, Sanderson Brocklebank was born. Sandy's first impressions of life were chiefly these—a farm kitchen in the glow of winter firelight, in the glow of summer sunshine; a warm necessary presence that was Mother, a big occasional presence with rough clothing that smelled of out-of-doors, which was Dad; a busy elderly presence, rather difficult for a small boy to please, which was Grandma. Beyond these were impressions of wide sunny meadows, sometimes dotted blue and white with violets, sometimes yellow and white with daisies and buttercups, sometimes yellow with cowslips. It was a shock to Sandy when he discovered that Dad, for some reason connected with the milk, hated the buttercups. Thereafter Sandy (whose eyes they gladdened) loyally hated them too, and pulled a face if ever he fancied he could taste them in the milk. Then there were memorable odors—hay and straw and manure in the farmyard, the sweetbrier smell of apples in the loft, a warm honey smell from the long serried rows of cows that stood morning and evening in the sheds at milking time. There was George Bates, slow yet companion-

able, who milked them, and other men here and there about the place—Joe Humberstone, Bill Lake.

Another presence came into the kitchen, baby Arthur; then baby Maurice. As time passed Sandy went to school. He did not afterward remember much about the beginning of it. Simply whereas there had been a time when he had not gone, then he went. He sat in the first row of the infants' gallery, and learned to write on a slate, and squeak his pencil like the others. After a time that seemed to Sandy to be the whole of his life hitherto, he progressed out of the infants' gallery, out of the girls' playground, into the boys'. Arthur and Maurice who had (so it seemed) been going with him to school for an indefinite period of years, he left in the gallery. Then they, too, moved up. Time began to shape itself.

The boys went every Sunday morning to church. Their father was Churchwarden. His election to office was a matter of course to every one in the parish except Bob Brocklebank. To him it was a solemn surprise, a subject about which there could be no point in jest. We all have, deep in our vitals, some such matter, though many of us speak of it more easily than did Bob Brocklebank. His wife was the only person who had the slightest idea (but she had an ample one) of his feeling about this office. To Sandy, Dad was the Churchwarden (together with some one else who did not particularly matter) as Mr. Brandon was just the Vicar. That was how the world was arranged—it called for no comment.

CHAPTER II

SANDY, when he grew up could remember the Boer War; not in its entirety, not chronologically, but as a time that was happy and glorious, God save the Queen! He was brought up in the atmosphere of fervid loyalty that pertained to the times, a loyalty maintained by an old woman of eighty who had reigned for sixty years. Surely no small feat, that maintenance! It may be thought that it is considerably easier to laugh at Victorianism than to do a thing like that. Sandy wagged little flags with all the strength of young arm and heart, and when the Queen died he sorrowed sincerely.

Sandy knew about the twenty thousand horse and foot going to Table Bay,—"Good-by, Dolly, I must leave you." He gloomed when the twenty thousand suffered reverse, he rejoiced with almost hysterical glee when they were victorious. Ladysmith, Mafeking, Buller, Methuen, White, Baden-Powell, French, Roberts, Kitchener—what romance was held in those names! Sandy wore on his coat with pride button photographs of all the British leaders. Those were times when heroes appeared heroic and received hero-worship from little boys.

Always at home Sandy's mother and grandmother were busy with babies—Maurice, Ellen, Bessie.

Sandy very vividly remembered the coming of peace.

On the Sunday morning he had been to church with his father and Arthur and Maurice. In the evening he and Arthur went alone. Maurice was only seven, Ellen five, and Bessie was the baby. Sandy's mother was ill in bed and there was a nurse in the house, and Dad seemed strict that evening. Sandy did not resent it, but Arthur did. He whispered resentfully to Sandy as they went out of the house.

"What's Dad so cross for?" he asked.

"Ain't cross," Sandy answered, "not cross with us *about* anything. He's worried, 'cos of mother. You shut up."

In that evening service there was an emotional something that he afterward remembered, a feeling of expectancy, and the nearness of God. Sandy, during the prayers, looked through his fingers, hoping to see something that might be God standing up by the altar; he was slightly disappointed to see nothing out of the ordinary. There were queer little thrilly sounds in the Vicar's voice—"cover their heads in the day of battle, and if it be Thy will give victory to our arms. . . ."

In his sermon Mr. Brandon said that "even now we might be on the verge of that peace for which we had so long prayed," and Sandy and Arthur went home in the twilight very solemnly discussing the possibilities of peace.

They were given supper as soon as they reached home by their grandmother, and sent straight to bed. Sandy particularly wanted to tell his father and mother what the Vicar had said, but he was not allowed to

see either of them. He resented the interference between him and his father and mother bitterly. Who was Grandma to dare to do this? He went to bed disliking his grandmother heartily.

However, both he and Arthur, who slept in the same bed, were soon asleep. Sandy was wakened by the sound of voices, and he sat straight up in bed and listened.

"Arthur!" he whispered.

"Um," said Arthur sleepily.

"There's some one talking."

"Well, is *that* all you've waked me up for? Go to sleep." Arthur turned over on his side.

"But it's the middle of the night."

"Well, then, go to sleep." And Arthur sank back again to slumber.

Sandy slipped out of bed and opened the door of their bedroom. His heart was thumping with the terrible fear that his mother was dead. The landing and his parents' room was lighted. He stood and listened. The voices did not sound distressed, and Sandy's heart ceased gradually to thump. He was panting as if he had been running. He was just turning to go back to bed when another strange sound startled him. Some one was knocking at the kitchen door, the door that opened straight out to the yard.

Sandy waited, expecting one of his elders to go down-stairs, but no one went. No one seemed to have heard the knock. It sounded again, and again Sandy looked expectantly toward the lighted room. No one

came out of it. Silently, with bare feet, his nightshirt flapping about him, he ran down to the kitchen. That also was lighted.

Sandy was a little frightened, wondering whoever had come at that time of night. He tried to see who it was by looking out of the window, but all was dark outside. He saw only a black shadowy figure near the door. Then, courageously, knowing that some one was awake up-stairs and he could shout, he put his hand to the bolt. But what if the person outside should overpower him before he could shout? Should he shout now? No, certainly, because of Mother. He slipped back the bolt, opened the door. The Vicar stepped into the kitchen.

Sandy gasped.

"Hello, sonny," said Mr. Brandon. "Queer time of night for me to come, isn't it? Cheer up, there's nothing wrong. Where's your father?"

"He's—he's up-stairs," Sandy stammered. He was quite used to seeing Mr. Brandon in his home. It was the time of night, and his one flapping garment that caused the stammer.

"Well, bring him down, Sandy, that's a man. It'll be worth it, he won't mind."

Sandy ran up-stairs; his father was just coming from the lighted bedroom.

"Dad," Sandy said, "here's the Vicar."

"Brandon? Here? Now?"

"Yes. He says he wants you. He says——"

Bob ran down-stairs, and Sandy after him. The two

men faced each other. It seemed for a moment almost as though the Vicar were filled with news too explosive to speak.

Then, "Man!" he exclaimed. "Oh, Brocklebank, it's peace!"

The two men grasped each other's hands and wrung and wrung them, Sandy watching. He saw the Vicar's lips twitch; he saw his father's face pucker up as though he were going to cry. Sandy was amazed. Why in the world should they want to cry because peace had come? He himself wanted to jump, to shout, to pull invisible ropes out of the ceiling, to bite something. He bit his own hand hard, and hurt it, and felt better.

"I had to come," the Vicar was saying. "David Tole came out from Biggleswade and gave me the news at—oh, it would be getting on for an hour ago. Waked us all up—noble fellow! I couldn't go to bed any more, and I saw your lights.—Is your wife——?"

"Wonderful, Vicar, thank God. A little girl—a real little beauty——"

"A victory gift, Brocklebank, a little peace girl. I congratulate you!"

"Thank you, sir. Will you have a drink?" Brocklebank went toward the cupboard under the stairs. Having reached it he turned. "Excuse me, Vicar," he said. "I must just slip up and tell the Missis."

"Rather! Of course you must."

Bob Brocklebank ran softly up-stairs. Neither of the men had taken any notice of Sandy. He wondered whether he ought to throw himself into the breach and

attend to the Vicar in the matter of a drink, but he was struck shy by the curious exhibition of emotion he had seen and did not understand. He did not know whether there might be a recurrence of it. He slipped into the dairy and waited. He would have bolted for the stairs, but he would have had to pass the Vicar.

Apparently Mr. Brandon had forgotten all about Sandy. He began to walk round and round the room, for he could not be still; sometimes he stopped and looked at a picture or an ornament.

Sandy wanted to run up-stairs and tell the other children, particularly Arthur, but every moment that passed seemed to make it more impossible for him to appear in the kitchen. It seemed a long while before he heard his father's step.

The two men faced each other again as Brocklebank stood at the bottom of the stairs.

"We've found a name for her," he said.

"Oh! What?" asked Mr. Brandon.

"Victoria Dorothy—the Missis found it."

The Vicar nodded, and Sandy heard him murmur, "Victory, the gift of God."

"We've been saying," said Brocklebank, "you often need some money to give away like (don't yer?) from the church. I mean—same as the early service collection—it ain't much for a parish like, is it? Same as if old Granny Huckle's took bad, or any of 'em—*you* know!"

"I do know," said the Vicar.

"Well, I'll give yer fifty pounds—yer can put it into

the Poor and Sick fund if yer like—or put it out to interest for it, if yer like—do what you know's best with it. See?"

"But Brocklebank, this—this is too generous. Are you sure you mean it—in soberness?"

"Lor', I'm sober enough! Oney, yer see, it's this way—I ain't much good at putting words together. See? We've got peace, ain't we? Well, yer see I ain't no good at saying things myself. If I want to say 'Thank yer' I've got to *do* it. See?"

"I do see," said the Vicar. "I wish there were more of us similarly inarticulate."

"Eh? In our what? Yer see—I'd have put down fifty quid *to get* peace, wouldn't I? Well, then—see? Any one wants to treat the Lord right, same as yer'd do any one else, don't yer?"

The Vicar said, "Bless you, Brocklebank, for the straight good chap you are."

Sandy saw his father shake his head as he fumbled for his check-book. He heard some one running down-stairs. The nurse appeared in the doorway.

"Mr. Brocklebank, will you come? Mrs. Brocklebank——"

Bob sprang up. "The Missis?" he cried.

"No, the old lady. She's—I've taken her into my room. She's felt the big strain all day, I think—and then the news of peace. I'm afraid——"

Bob ran up-stairs after the nurse; almost at once he came down again, his ruddy face gone pale under its tan.

"Vicar," he said, "will you come?"

The two men went up-stairs, and Sandy followed them. His grandmother lay on the nurse's bed looking yellow-white, her mouth wide open, her breath coming noisily, terribly. Sandy shook all over.

Brocklebank sat on the bed and raised his mother in his arms. "Mother," he said, "Mother, it's Bob, see!"

The terrible breathing went on. Old Mrs. Brocklebank took no notice of her son. Sandy thought it cruel of her. He could hardly bear his father's pleading: "Mother, don't you know me? It's Bob, see!"

The Vicar knelt beside the bed and began to pray softly, committing "the soul of the departing into the Hand of God."

"Mighty!" Sandy muttered. "Oh, mighty, mighty, mighty, she's going to die!" His hands wrenched themselves in and out of each other. "Mighty, mighty, mighty, she's going to die!"

Suddenly there was a sound of a dreadful choke, then the breathing ceased.

"She's gone," said the Nurse.

Brocklebank rose and laid his mother very gently back on the pillow, and turned to go out. He saw Sandy.

"*You* here, Sandy?" he said. "Get back to bed with you, little lad. You didn't ought to have been here."

"Oh, Dad!" Sandy exclaimed.

"You go on, son, when I tell you. That's a good lad. There's no one got to go telling the Missis, Nurse. You understand?"

"Oh, certainly," said the nurse.

Sandy went back to bed. Arthur still slept. Sandy was shivering all over, but he was not cold. Nothing belonging to him seemed as if it would keep still. He could not stay in bed, simply could not. He slipped out again, and went and sat on the stairs where he could see into the kitchen.

His father's head was on his arms on the table. The emotions of the whole day had overcome him. The Vicar had his arm over his father's shoulder.

"Dear man," Mr. Brandon was saying, "dear man."

Sandy heard his father sob, and for the second time that night he bit his hand.

Said Mr. Brandon, "I expect you'd like me to go and tell the Doctor at once, wouldn't you? And I'll come first thing in the morning again, and see if there's anything I can do. Any mortal thing, Brocklebank, you know that." He turned to go.

"Vicar!"

"Yes."

"I didn't ought to have told her, did I?"

"About peace? But, my dear fellow, you *can't*—I mean, of course you told her."

"I knowed she'd got a weak heart; she's had it years."

"But she was bound to have heard."

"Yes, but yer see, she was tired out, looking after the Missis and the children, and doing. To-morrow, if she'd a good rest, she might——"

"Look here, Brocklebank, don't torture yourself so

needlessly. It's not a bad thing to go home, you know. No long illness, no dependence on others, why it's splendid—for her. I count myself a very happy man, Brocklebank, but I could envy her. Don't, *don't* fret for *her* sake. I'm going straight to the Doctor. Shall I come back to you?"

"No, no, don't trouble yourself to-night, Vicar. But there's that I want you to have. That there—you know."

"I *don't* know," said Brandon.

Brocklebank pulled a check-book out of his pocket and smeared away his tears with the back of his hand.

"Oh!" the Vicar exclaimed. "Ask me to take it another time." He turned and fled.

Brocklebank's head went down on his arm again.

Sandy ran down-stairs. "Dad!" he said.

Brocklebank looked up. "I told you to go to bed," he said. "Why ain't you gone, little chap?"

"I did go. Oh, Dad!"

Brocklebank opened his arms half willingly and enclosed his boy.

"Dad," said Sandy, "why hasn't God blessed you when you're straight and good, same as the Vicar said?"

"I ain't good, Sandy," said Bob. "He didn't ought to have said anything like that. And he *has* too—I had a good mother, that I did—and she was a good grandma to you. You'll always remember her, won't yer, Sandy?"

Sandy nodded. "Yes, Dad," he said, and felt very

guilty for some of the things that he would remember. How he had hated her that night! It was obviously absurd of his father to think that she was good and he was not. Sandy clung closer to him; he did not feel it was the time to argue.

"She didn't suffer, Sandy, not ten minutes—there's that to think of. And what if it had been your mother! Cord lumme! It might 'a' been!" As the awfulness of this realization sank into his brain his arms tightened round his first-born. "Cord lumme!" he whispered.

Then suddenly he loosed Sandy. "Whatever would your mother say?" he asked. "You get back to bed quick. If you don't catch a bad cold after this *I* dunno. You go and get straight in, and I've told you not to come out no more, and don't you forget it." He kissed him. "'Op it!" he said.

Sandy went, strangely comforted. He was not desperately woeful that his grandmother was dead. Children very rarely love old people. He wished he had not been so angry with her at supper-time. He closed his eyes but opened them quickly with a little stifled cry. His first sight of death had been a baptism of horror. When he closed his eyes he saw it all again. Presently he began to shake as he had shaken in the bedroom. He would have liked to wake Arthur and tell him about it, but he felt years and years older than Arthur. He did not feel that Arthur would be much use.

CHAPTER III

THE next day every one knew that peace had come. Flags flew, no one worked, every one made as much noise as possible, church bells rang. The tower of Shepton Church rocked with the clashing musical uproar of its five bells. Only for one startling and dreadfully incongruous hour a single bell tolled for the passing of Bob's mother.

Only at Bentley was there quiet. There blinds were drawn, shutting out the sunshine and the merrymaking world. The children did not fret for the grandmother (except Arthur, who manifested an affection for her that startled the others), but they were awed; they huddled together in groups and whispered.

After breakfast a Mrs. Larkins from the Bury farm came in to help and to sympathize, and soon the farm kitchen seemed crowded with neighbors, women with expansive hearts and easily wielded tears.

Their chief anxiety was expressed in one constant question, "And how's the Missis taking it, Mr. Brocklebank?"

"As well as you can expect," Bob would answer. He knew very well that the women had come with the intention of seeing with their own eyes the effect the shock had had on Nellie. It gave him a real sense of pleasure to disappoint them. They saw nothing but the darkened kitchen, and they went away grumbling.

"Didn't even ask us to see the corpse," said one of them. "I didn't think Bob Brocklebank would have taken it like that—so close like."

"No. And we *could* have spoke a word of comfort to his poor wife. But there, he's a man, and men don't understand the consolation of a word like from a woman same as yerself that's been through it."

"Well, the only one as seems to have a tear for the poor old lady, as ever *I* could see, was young Arthur. Nice likely boy, I s'think. But he won't do no good if his father brings up close."

"Ah! You ain't half right. But perhaps she doesn't make a nice corpse. You never know—when people go off sudden."

"That may be it, of course. Very like he's ashamed. Now, when *my* mother died she made a lovely corpse —beautiful. You wouldn't believe the people as come to see her—there was crowds and crowds, and the place fair smothered in flowers. Just like a carved angel she looked, and we *did* do her well. Her insurance didn't cover it, I can tell yer—and we never spent a penny of it on our black."

Only Mrs. Larkins stayed and was taken to see Nellie. They were near neighbors, and Nellie was fond of her. She asked Bob to let her take the four eldest children back with her to the Bury, and he accepted the offer gladly. He did not like to see them gloomed in a still house.

Sandy did not want to go. "Let me stay with you, Dad," he pleaded. "I'd heaps rather stay with you."

"But I want you to look after the others, son," said Bob. "See as they behave theirselves at Mrs. Larkins' —see?"

"Oh!" Sandy exclaimed. Of course if he ought to take care of the family that was different.

"And am I to let them go to the school for this Peace do?" asked Mrs. Larkins. "Tommy has come home with a big tale that they're giving the children a Peace do this afternoon—a tea and races or something—I don't know. No one's asked us for any money about it yet, but I expect they will do. Am I to let the children go, Bob?"

"Cord, yes," said Bob. "Let them go. I don't see it will do no harm, and it'll take their minds off. Won't do their grandma no good for them to keep away, will it?"

So in spite of all that had happened the children of Bentley were present at the celebration of peace in the parish of Shepton. There was a service in church, then tea at the school.

It hurt Maurice considerably that he had to borrow a cup, thick and useful, from Mrs. Larkins. His own beautiful mug, with a portrait of Lord Roberts blazoned on its side, had been forgotten and left at home. He walked along with the other children (there were two young Larkins) over the fields to church, and he swung the cup on his finger, pouting silently.

Sandy observed him. "What's the matter, Maurry?" he asked.

"I want my Lord Roberts mug."

"The tea'll taste just as nice out of the cup."

"But I *want* my mug." Maurry's lower lip protruded. "Jimmie's got his."

Sandy looked at the flag-emblazoned mug carried in the hand of the young Larkins. "Never mind, Maurry," he said. "You shall have it all day to-morrow. I'll ask for yer. Be good now."

"It's a horrid old cup," said Maurice. "I hate it, I do. I want my mug."

"Maurry, you be good. It's rude."

"I do hate it. She gave me an old one on purpose, 'cause she said it wouldn't matter much then if I broke it. I'll break it." He raised the cup threateningly, and Sandy stayed his hand.

"You're a naughty boy, Maurry." Sandy looked round, fearful that Mrs. Larkins might be overhearing his brother's rudeness. "You'll drink your tea out of that cup, or—Maurry, if you cry I'll smack you hard."

Maurice was puckering his face, and beginning the "Oo-oo-oo!" that always preceded one of his howls.

"Maurry," said Sandy furiously, "shut up and I'll fetch it for you. I'll run home and fetch it. Only shut up—quick, or you shan't have it."

Maurice, with an effort, for he was getting under way, obeyed.

Sandy whispered to his friend, Tommy Larkins, "I'm going 'ome for something. Shan't be long."

"You'll be too late for church."

"Can't help it."

Sandy dropped behind the church-going elders, then

turned and fled over the fields to Bentley. It was a good twenty minutes' run. The house was filled with deathly stillness. Sandy crept into the dairy feeling like a thief, found the mug, crept out again and ran. He was glad no one had seen him, for he had no time for explanation.

He arrived at church red and hot, during a prayer. It did not strike him to wait till the prayer was over, and his boots made a loud clatter on the tile paved floor. He slunk into a seat beside some other boys.

"What 'ave yer brought yer great ole mug for?" one of them whispered. "We had to leave them in school. No one's brought them to church."

"'Ang!" Sandy whispered, "oh, 'ang!" He tried to hide the mug on the floor behind the kneelers. One or two of the boys began to titter, and Sandy's red face went redder. He had that horror of being laughed at, of being conspicuous, which is the heritage of every Bedfordshire boy. It had been bad enough to have to come into church late. He suffered discomfort in extreme degree, the tall rim of the mug still visible behind the kneeler.

Presently a hymn was given out,—*Now Thank We All Our God,*—and the wretched mug was almost forgotten in the joy of sound. There were more prayers, and a talk from the Vicar, and then the National Anthem.

"Send him victorious,
Happy and glorious,
Long to reign over us—
God save the Que-ing!"

And then they went to the school, Sandy hiding the mug as well as he could. Its size, he found, was awful. He delivered it to Maurice and breathed more freely.

"Where's the cup?" he asked.

"*I* dunno."

"Maurry, you've *not* broken it?"

"No, it's in school somewhere. I left it."

"Oh!"

Sandy retrieved the cup. He was desperately anxious to hide from Mrs. Larkins the fact that it was despised. He carried it about with him.

All went well at tea-time, but afterward Arthur, who had eaten too much, was very sick. Sandy was disgusted. Arthur certainly wished it had not happened. He tried to make up for it by pretending afterward that he felt perfectly well, and by joining in all the games and races organized by Mr. Brandon and a few others.

"Pooh!" he said. "It's nothing to be sick. I'm often sick."

It was not true, but when Arthur actually won the hundred yards flat for boys for his year, Sandy forgave him, and every one else who knew of the little contretemps, believed that what he had said about himself must be true.

Sandy for a long while took no part in the sports, though he longed to do so. He was too busy minding Ellen. Then a high jump for boys of eleven and twelve was announced, and he could not resist it. He knew he could beat any of them at jumping. He saw Maurice standing near.

"Here," he said, "mind Ellen a bit. I'm going in for this."

Maurice took Ellen's hand, but he did not hold it long. He was very proud indeed of Sandy's jumping, and he needed his hands to clap. He stood to view as near as he could get, so did Arthur.

Sandy, out of the corner of his eye, saw both his brothers, but he did not dare or deign to speak to them. An actor can not converse with the audience while he is on the stage. Sandy jumped well, and Maurice danced on his toes with joy. ("Go *it,* our Sandy, you go *it,* our Sandy!") He beat the others long before he reached his limit, and he jumped on and on, to accompaniment of the cheers of all.

He reached his limit at last and retired very quickly into the crowd, looking bad-tempered, because he didn't know how to put up with everybody's staring at him now he was off the stage, covered with glory. He felt there would be bad taste in looking too triumphant.

Mr. Brandon went after him and asked him if he would care to join in the thirteen-fourteen jump for the thirteen- and fourteen-year-old boys, not for the prize, just for the sake of competition. It was the proudest moment of his life. His eyes glowed.

"Would you like to?" asked the Vicar, "or are you too puffed? I say, Mr. Larkins, what about having another event first? Let the youngster take his breath."

"It doesn't matter, sir," Sandy panted. "I'm all right."

"You take the advice of a rugger player, my boy,"

said Mr. Brandon. "Take your breath whenever you can."

So they ran a hundred yards flat for girls of fourteen. Sandy watched them line up without interest; he was fully occupied filling his lungs.

He heard a scream behind him, but his senses were exalted above screams. Let others notice such things; he filled his lungs.

Some one caught at his arm. "Sandy Brocklebank—your Ellen; she's in the pond!"

Sandy came to earth with a jerk. *"What?"*

"She climbed on the rails, and she's fell in. Quick!"

They ran. Mrs. Larkins was just climbing out of the pond with Ellen in her arms, the little fat girl sobbing and screaming, both of them drenched and plastered with mud.

"Sandy," Mrs. Larkins cried, "why weren't you looking after Ellen? She might have been drowned if I hadn't just seen her. And look what a state I'm in. Look at my dress!"

Sandy looked, with a feeling deep in his heart that there was something very unjust about this blame, but he could not point out where the injustice lay. He said, *"I* didn't know she'd climb the rails. I was oney jumpin'. I told Maurry to look after her."

"Maurry? Why, he's only a baby himself. Take Ellen home at once, Sandy, and wash her, and put her into dry things."

Sandy received at Mrs. Larkins' hands the howling bundle of mud that was Ellen. He went very red indeed.

"Can't Arthur go?" he asked. "I'm just goin' to jump with the thirteens and fourteens. Mr. Brandon asked me."

"Jump again? Haven't you done enough harm jumping? Mr. Brandon certainly wouldn't wish you to jump if he knew what had happened, *I* know. And why should Arthur go any more than you, I should like to know? You're the eldest. I can't stay talking, I'm drenched to the skin. I'll catch my death, and so will the poor child. Take her home at once, Sandy. Take her *home*. You may think yourself a very lucky boy you've got your little sister to take home, and that she's not drowned."

The bell rang for the assembling of the thirteens and fourteens for the high jump. Sandy turned away, leading Ellen by her wet and muddy hand. He spoke to no one.

Said a girl's voice at his elbow, "Sandy, it's a *shame*. It's a beastly shame. Shall I make Arthur come?"

Sandy turned and saw Helen Brandon, the Vicar's eleven-year-old daughter. He swallowed, for the touch of sympathy was bad to bear. He shook his head.

"Why?" Helen demanded.

"He wouldn't, I think."

"I'll make him."

Sandy dared not keep Ellen standing, she was shivering with cold. He started toward home, hoping that in a moment Arthur would overtake him, but Arthur did not come.

He hurried Ellen home, scolding her wrathfully the

while, for the "silly little half-baked, fat-head, half-sharp" little nuisance that she was. He bathed her before the kitchen fire, for the first time missing his grandmother acutely—she would certainly have bathed Ellen. He gave her her supper and put her to bed.

Somehow Helen had taken the sharpest edge off his disappointment. It helped no end that some one was indignant for him. He had a reward too in the circumstance of his being home early. He was allowed to see his mother and baby Victoria Dorothy. He had very little interest in the baby, but the world seemed made over again by the sight of his mother. She told him that the baby was just like Dad, and he did not dispute it, but he felt that it was like nothing on earth but another baby, of which annoying, far too important and pampered little beasts, there were already too many in the world.

But his mother and he talked confidentially of Grandma, and of peace, and he told her about Ellen and Mrs. Larkins' dress, and the mud, whereat his mother's irrepressible sense of the ridiculous made her smile. She saw things in pictures. But she insisted that Ellen should be brought to her, and looked over, and kissed.

Sandy had not let his mother know that he had grudged coming home. It would have been so mean to let her know that he had grudged looking after the others when she was ill, so he said nothing about the thirteen-fourteen jump, and nothing about that even more guilty and warming thing, Helen's anger on his

behalf. But when Nellie said good night to him she pulled him down to her and kissed him.

"You're Mother's own good boy," she whispered. "Mother's comfort, *that* you are!"

He heard the others come in, and clumped down the stairs to meet them in his big schoolboy boots, feeling that all was very well.

"Where's your mug, Maurry?" he asked, not seeing the burden of a few hours before.

"It's broke," said Maurice unconcernedly.

"Oh, Maurry, how did you break it?"

"The handle come off," said Maurry, "so me and Jimmie Larkins put it on a stone and throwed at it. Mrs. Larkins said we didn't ought to, but it was done then."

A fear came to Sandy, for Maurry's honesty was of the clear and elemental type. "Didn't you tell her it was your mug?"

"Oh, she knowed. I told her you'd gone for it, when you went over the fields, you know, 'cos I didn't like her old cup"

After supper, the others having gone to bed, Sandy sat with his father at the kitchen fire. His elbows were on his knees, and his chin in his hands. He was nursing at his lips a mouth organ, his prize for the jump. Arthur had brought it home for him. He longed to try it, but would not, because of Grandma lying so still up-stairs, and he sat and mused, learning the feel of it.

"Penny for your thought, son," said his father, smiling.

"I was just thinking I'd never get married," said Sandy.

"Why?" asked Bob.

"I don't never want a family of kids tacked on to me," he said. "It's awful."

And Bob Brocklebank lay back in his chair and laughed. It was the first laugh that had sounded in laughter-loving Bentley for two whole days. Bob dived into his pocket and held out two coins to Sandy.

"'Ere, son," he said, "that's worth tuppence, that is."

Arthur, when Sandy went to bed, was lying with his head buried. He sniffed very audibly when Sandy opened the door.

"Whatever's up?" asked Sandy.

Arthur showed a doleful face. "I'm not crying," he said, "but I am very nearly; I think I would have been in a minute. I know you're as cross as anything with me."

"What for? Making a pig of yourself? I shouldn't fret over that now. Don't do it again."

"Oh, *that's* nothing. I'm often sick. It——"

"Arthur!"

"Well, I'm sure I am—sort of. Anyway, I'm bothering about the other sort of pig I am, not that sort, a heaps worse damn' sort of pig. I ought to have come home and let you jump, Sandy."

"Well, I think you might, as a matter of fact, but it's a lot too late to bother now. I'm not bothering now."

"I'm so awfully sorry, Sandy," Arthur said. There were tears in his eyes.

"You needn't be," said Sandy a little wearily. "I did tell Dad I'd take care of you all. I'm the eldest."

"Yes," said Arthur, controlling his emotion without any serious effort. "You are the eldest, and that makes all the difference, doesn't it? I told Miss Helen so, but she didn't see it, and I was so afraid you weren't seeing it either. I'm so glad you do. They were giving away cakes and things at the end, and I'd have brought one home for you, only there was only one each. I'm so glad you see it about being the eldest."

"Oh, go to sleep," said Sandy. "I see it all right."

CHAPTER IV

FOLLOWED the doleful rites of Mrs. Brocklebank's funeral. Sandy, Arthur, their father and Aunt Winnie (come over for the day) attended the funeral. The church was filled with sympathizers, for (as the *Biggleswade Chronicle* put it) "Mrs. Brocklebank had been known and respected in Shepton all her life."

Sandy and Arthur had been supplied with clean handkerchiefs, and Arthur used his nicely at the proper times. Sandy's nose stayed obstinately dry, though he saw his father's grief with a heart that ached, and he envied Arthur his happy ability to do the right thing. Again in church on Sunday Arthur wept gently when *Now the Laborer's Task Is O'er* was sung for his grandmother—and half the congregation forgot at the critical moment to turn the italicized "him" into "her." Bob did not collect that morning, a sympathetic sidesman saved him the pain of walking round the church while Shepton committed his mother's soul to the keeping of God. After service the four of them (Maurice was taken to church) stood for a while over the grave with its fading wreaths and then went home.

Gradually things became normal again at Bentley. Nellie resumed her housewifely duties, and Bob got in a girl by the day to help his wife. He would have got in some one who was also willing to be girl by the night, but Nellie would not hear of it.

"We'd never be shut of her *night* nor day," she said. "If we wanted a bit of peace when you come in of a night we'd all have to go into the front room, and think of the work that would mean, living in the parlor. I couldn't stand never to be shut of her. Bad enough to have a stranger in at all. I'd go bang orf me head, and then what should yer do, eh?"

"Lor'!" said Bob.

So Violet Medlock became a girl by the day.

Sandy, Arthur and Maurice went normally back to school, soon taking with them Ellen, aged five. Sandy was personally responsible for Ellen, but usually he did not find the burden overpowering, for Ellen early developed independence and common sense. Possibly the affair of the pond taught its lesson. She accumulated her own friends and her own little ideas, and resented brotherly interference.

The infant-class teacher said that she was clever and praised her. The three boys, though by no means stupid at school, were not exceptionally clever, and Sandy began to be proud of Ellen. He noted how she ordered the other infants and how they obeyed her, and he smiled with fatherly amusement.

Sometimes he would peep through the glass door into the infant room, there to see Ellen learning to write or to read, or to do sums on her little greasy slate. The usual infant method of erasure from the slate was to spit and rub. She insisted on taking to school a little wet sponge. Her brothers thought this despicable foolishness, "putting on side" too, and they

told her so in set terms, but Ellen, perfectly undaunted, insisted on the little sponge.

Once when Sandy peeped through the glass door Ellen was reciting. Standing before an entranced audience, she was holding the floor with a non-stop run of words and conventional gestures. She was doing very well, and a broad smile, amused, fatherly, admiring, overspread Sandy's face as he watched her. His father's face, if he had seen them both, would probably have had the same expression.

Sandy was also developing his own tastes, and considerable imagination, fed on Mayne Reade, and the new thrilling tales of Sherlock Holmes which were appearing in the *Strand Magazine*. The Vicar lent him those, sharing his joy in them, finding him back numbers—to his great content. And about this period the goat happened. This was an episode that caught Sandy's growing imagination and fired his ambition, even it turned his mind to a definite groove of endeavor.

A great friendship had sprung up, since the peace celebration, between the young Larkins and the young Brocklebanks, and Tommy Larkins owned a goat. Sandy helped Tommy to groom and feed the animal, and when one cold and shining spring morning two little kids arrived, his interest became violent. He longed for a goat, and the rest of the family caught his longing after they had seen the kids.

They all begged their father to bring them a goat, and Bob, after telling them that they could not pos-

sibly want such a nasty smelly animal, brought them one, much to his wife's amusement, and rather to his own. They had promised to keep the goat clean.

"I wonder what in the world yer'll bring 'em next," Nellie said.

Bob (he was at supper the night of the goat's coming) filled his mouth with bread and cheese, and then answered somewhat sheepishly, "Well, yer see, they're little now, oney little, ain't they? Yer don't really mind, do yer, darlin'? Cord! In ten years' time they won't be asking me for a goat."

At first it was a great pleasure to groom and feed Billy. The children quarreled with one another as to whose turn it was to tend him, and Billy grew fat and very silky. He was a gentle and tractable animal, at least with the children, but he had one intolerable fault —he would never stay anywhere he was put, and his reputation in the district became bad. Billy was a good joke to every one, except Bob, who was constantly having to pay for damages Billy had done—to Mr. Lee's haystacks, or Mr. Larkins' beans, or Joe Bates' solar plexus—for the goat butted grown-ups freely in his wild wanderings.

Bob threatened again and again to sell the goat, but he did not do it because there was always such an outcry among the children, even during the period when all of them except Sandy had begun to lose their first joy in the possession of Billy—to forget when it was their turn to groom and feed him. Billy became more and more Sandy's goat; at last he became almost en-

tirely Sandy's responsibility, and Sandy did not mind, for he loved his silky friend.

Billy too loved Sandy; he would bleat when he heard his step, he would nuzzle his head into the boy's body, he would answer his questions by silly bleats that sounded almost human; but he would escape. "Brocklebank's Billy" became a standing joke.

He escaped one spring night and appeared in the churchyard during the Easter vestry meeting, just at the time when Brocklebank with courage and rough dignity was rating his neighbors soundly for the meanness of their contributions to church expenses. Mr. Larkins and one or two others became very funny indeed. In seeming solemn manner Larkins rose and asked questions such as, "Has the Churchwarden a legal right to graze his goat in the churchyard?" They teased him unmercifully, and Bob felt that the limit had been reached.

He delivered an ultimatum. "If that there goat gets out again I'll sell it straight," he told his eldest son.

Sandy's whole energy became concentrated on keeping Billy at home. He was tied in the shed by his neck and one leg. It was too much even for "Brocklebank's Billy."

In those days Arthur and Maurice each acquired a rabbit, John and Julia respectively; these were presents from young Jimmie Larkins, who owned rabbits. The new pets finally took attention from Billy. He was not interesting tied in the shed. And Maurice was developing a great love of flowers. He brought home

violet and cowslip roots and planted them about the garden.

One evening Maurice suddenly realized that he had been treating Sandy shabbily about the goat. It was a shock to him, and he lost no time. He ran to Billy's shed ready to make up for past negligence. He saw the goat had nothing to eat, and he looked round for something to give him. Growing on the other side of the road was a handsome yew tree, green and goodly. Grass was still scanty in the meadows. Maurice climbed the fence, gathered as much of the yew as he could, laid it at the goat's feet and watched him eat it, as he groomed him. He tidied away the twigs Billy had left and went back to the house with the nice feeling that he had done what he should—now, anyhow. He meant to tell Sandy how sorry he was that he had neglected Billy and left everything to him.

But Sandy had gone to the Bury and Maurice had to wait till supper-time before he came in, when he burst in at the door with a white scared face.

"Where's Dad?" he asked.

His mother answered, "Gone to see Mr. Lee. What's the matter, son?"

Sandy did not wait to answer, he shut the door and ran over the fields to Lee's farm. He found his father and Mr. Lee sitting in the parlor smoking cigars. He could not wait to be ceremonious. "Dad," he said, "will you come?—Good evening, Mr. Lee. Oh, Dad. it's Billy—I think he's dying."

Old Simon Lee sat up. "One of your boys, Bob?" he asked anxiously.

"No, no. It's oney Sandy's old goat. What's the matter, son?"

"I don't know, Dad. He's rolling about, and his mouth's foaming——"

"Foaming?"

"Yes."

"How's his feet?"

"I don't know. I didn't look."

Bob jumped from his chair, and Mr. Lee rose too. "Don't get scared, Bob lad," he said, and patted his shoulder with his lean old hand. "There's no foot and mouth nearer than Leicester——"

"No," said Bob, and smiled, but the smile did not look altogether convincing. "No, it couldn't be that—oney we don't want another pig do on Bentley. Makes yer kind er think anything might happen, don't it?" He laughed. "You'll excuse me going."

Sandy and his father hurried back over the fields to Bentley. The goat was dead. Brocklebank stooped over him and examined his mouth and his feet.

"It ain't," he said, and sat down on a pile of wood and mopped his brow. "Thank God it ain't foot and mouth."

Poor Sandy looked upon Billy, and his face went very red, as his father, relieved almost to exhaustion, thanked God for what seemed to him a small matter. Why did it matter so much what Billy had died of, seeing that he was dead?

Bob said, "We'll have to have the vet, Sandy. You'd better go to Biggleswade and fetch him. You can have your supper before you go—that won't hurt."

"Don't want supper," said Sandy. "I'll go now."

He felt his father's arm come about him. "Hard lines, son," Bob said. "It's part of a farmer's life. You've got to be a good loser to be a farmer, Sandy."

Sandy put his head against his father and wept for his dead friend, and Bob hugged him close. He walked the three miles to Biggleswade and rode back in the veterinary surgeon's tall dog-cart.

The vet turned Billy over. "The goat's poisoned," he said. "What's he been having?"

"Only hay—and stuff," said Sandy. "He's been tied up lately because he would roam away."

Mr. Dunlop stooped to the floor and picked up a dark saber-like little leaf. "Here you are," he said.

"Yew!" Bob exclaimed. "Sandy, have you given him yew?"

"No," said Sandy, "of course I haven't."

"I bet you that's it," said the vet. "We'll see."

He took an instrument from his bag and made a neat cut across the goat's stomach. Billy was full of yew. In spite of his trouble Sandy was tremendously impressed. Mr. Dunlop was Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson in one splendid personality.

They went to the house where Mr. Dunlop was invited to wash his hands and take supper. The children were in bed, and Bob went up to them. "Have any of yer been giving Billy yew to eat?" he asked.

"I did," answered Maurice promptly. "He hadn't got nothing, and he liked it, and I groomed him for Sandy. Oh, Dad, didn't I ought to have done it?"

"You didn't know that was poison then, Maurry?"

Maurice sat up, his face perfectly white and his dark eyes staring. "Poison!" he cried. "Is he dead?"

"He's dead, little son."

Maurice screamed, and the screams turned into wild sobbings. Nellie ran up-stairs to him.

"I didn't mean to, I didn't mean to. Oh, oh, oh, tell Sandy I didn't mean to. Oh, oh, oh, tell Sandy I didn't mean to," he sobbed.

"Sandy knows you didn't mean to, sonny," said his mother. "There, don't scream so, Maurry. Mr. Dunlop's here."

But he could not be quieted, and at last Nellie went down-stairs.

"Sandy," she said, "you'd better go up to Maurry."

Sandy went red. "I don't want to," he said. "What did he want to interfere with Billy at all for?"

"Oh, son! He's oney little."

"He's big enough to—kill Billy."

"He never meant to, Sandy dear."

Sandy did not move.

"He's your little brother, Sandy."

"I don't want him to be," said Sandy. "It's not my fault he is. I wish I hadn't any brothers, or sisters either, they're always doing *something* beastly."

"Sandy!" There was real pain in his mother's voice. "All right," she said, "I won't ask yer no more." She turned away into the dairy.

Sandy said, "Oh, Mum!" and went up-stairs to Maurice's room.

"Stop that row," he said roughly.

"Sandy, I didn't mean to," Maurice wailed. "Oh, oh, oh, I didn't mean to."

"I know you didn't. You needn't have interfered. You've not gone near him for days."

"I know—that was why. I meant to help you. I thought I'd been beastly not doing him because of Julia and everything. Oh, I'm sorry, Sandy. Will you forgive me? I didn't m——"

"Well, he's dead now, so it's no good howling. Shut up and go to sleep." Sandy turned to go.

"Sandy, will you have Julia instead? I'll give her to you."

The elder boy stopped. This was real penitence. Poor little chap, he ought to be sorry, but to give up his rabbit——

"No, of course I won't take your Julia," he said. "Go to sleep, I'll forgive you. You wouldn't have done it if you'd known it was poison. There, don't cry any more."

"Oh, Sandy, come back. Come here."

He came.

"Won't you 'ave *half* Julia?"

Maurry's face, tear-stained and pleading, looked up at him. In spite of himself he smiled. What a baby Maurry was! What earthly use was there in half a rabbit? But Maurry's sincerity was so evident that he had not the heart to put the question to him. He said, "No, no. I won't take any of Julia."

"Oh, please, *please,*" Maurice pleaded. "I feel so

bad, Sandy. You don't know how sorry I am. I'm so awful sorry."

He began to cry again, and Sandy patted his shoulder. He thought that caress manly, almost old-manly, like Mr. Lee. "All right," he said, "all right. There, I'll have half Julia if you'll stop crying."

He felt that it was a verbal acceptance of an empty gift, the humoring of a weeping babe. He went downstairs again, and found his mother in the dairy, getting supper for Mr. Dunlop.

"You've forgiven him, ain't yer?" she asked.

Sandy nodded. "He cried till I said I'd have half his Julia."

They looked into each other's eyes and laughed, and then suddenly Nellie cuddled Sandy's head to her, and there were tears in her eyes and in her voice.

"Eh," said she. "I haven't half got a dear sonny."

Sandy choked. "I didn't mean it about the others, Mum."

"You no need to tell me," said his mother. "D'yer think I ain't said many a thing myself when I've been put out, and p'raps not so much call as you had neither. I'm real glad you've forgiven him, son. Take this plate of bread and butter on to the table, will yer?"

Sandy took it, and his heart was warm, though his eyes were wet.

Maurry's gift of half Julia was not after all an empty one. Julia presented Maurry (to the child's unbounded delight and surprise) with eight pretty youngsters, and he insisted that four of them were Sandy's.

He was a simple soul with the same single idea of right as had his father.

In a fit of disgust because the rabbit John did not similarly serve him Arthur gave him to his brothers, and began to collect frogs. He caught them in ponds and by the wayside, and brought them home to the rain butt—to the horror of Violet Medlock, the girl by the day, who had to draw water from there.

Arthur, of course, discovered that Violet feared his frogs, and it became a game of his to catch one on his return from school, and chase Violet round the kitchen with it. He said that frogs were better than rabbits any day.

The rabbits prospered. Sandy and Maurice began to do quite a little trade with them, to the interest and amusement of their father. He started all the children from Sandy to Victoria Dorothy with a post-office savings account. He put a pound in it for each of them. Every now and then Sandy and Maurice added to their accounts a few shillings made through rabbits. Frogs can be great fun, but there is no money in them, neither is there money in being clever at school—at any rate until one reaches scholarship age.

CHAPTER V

DURING the years that followed Sandy occasionally allowed himself to imagine that he was free to choose what he would be. In those moments he thought of himself as a vet. He had very greatly admired the deft way in which Mr. Dunlop had handled Billy, the manner in which he had picked up the yew leaf and had drawn his conclusions, the neat dramatic incision across Billy's abdomen. The detective side of diagnosis was very fascinating to him; he too wished to be Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson all in one.

Since Billy's death he had learned by inquiry something of the farmers' terror—foot and mouth disease; and when his mind was thus luxuriously wandering he imagined that great districts were struck down one after another by cattle plague, that hundreds of farmers were ruined, and that he, Veterinary-Surgeon-Detective Sanderson Brocklebank, discovered that an animal carrying the disease was being driven through the country by a Boer—preferably de Wet—and that his discoveries led to the villain's capture, and to the recovery of the country. Or else he was going to discover the cause, prevention and cure of lamb fever, for which he would probably be knighted—"Sir Sanderson Brocklebank, Bart."—it would look well, and oh, it would be lovely to do it, just to do it, even if no one in the world ever knew who had done it. Sandy's ambition lay very deep.

Maurice wanted either to drive a threshing-machine or to be a policeman; Arthur wanted to be a clergyman. The limelight in which Mr. Brandon seemed to move appealed to Arthur; also he thought that a parson had nothing to do but preach on Sundays, and any fool could just stand up and talk. An ideal life!

But Sandy knew his dreams as dreams. There was Bentley to farm, and he must farm it and in due course inherit it. That Arthur and Maurice would work on the farm was never seriously questioned in the family, but that Sandy should do anything else was never dreamed of, no faintest flicker of any such thought ever crossed the mind of any one. It was the life he had been born and reared for. Was he not the eldest son of Brocklebank?

So Sandy contemplated leaving Shepton school without regret. He was going to live a man's life, even if it was not the life he would have chosen. After all one never knew what might happen. He could probably get a lot of vet books to read during winter evenings.

He was quite right in feeling that one never knew what might happen. There was an undreamed-of future for him. He did not know that it was discussed out in a wheat-field one fine hot night when he and the other children were asleep, and his father and mother strolled out-of-doors into the scented velvet night, renewing old thoughts and feelings that had grown, not stale, but only mellow with the passing years.

"I'm thinking about our ole Sandy," said Bob, "reckons he's done schooling end of this term, don't 'e?"

"Well, he has, hasn't he?"

"I dunno," said Bob. "He's a fine little chap, ain't he? Whatameantersay—we're saying it ourselves but he *is,* ain't 'e?"

"Ah! But then he's older than the others. He *ought* to have more sense, didn't he?"

"That's right, oney, I was thinking. I've been turning it over in me mind for ev's'long. I'd like to give him a real chance in life."

"Well, 'e'll get it—on Bentley, won't he?"

"Well, it's like this 'erer, yer see, darlin'. I've always known it's been a big disadvantage to me as I'm not better eddicated, see? Look at Larkins!"

"Well, look at him!" Nellie exclaimed, jealous for her man against himself. "You're a long sight better man than ole Larkins any day of the week."

Bob laughed. "You do talk silly sometimes, don't yer?" he said.

"You know very well he ain't as good a farmer as what you are."

"It ain't altogether the farming," said Bob heavily, finding himself burdened with a great weight of explanation. "I'm thinking about something about Larkins as you can't altoget' put your finger on, not to say exactly what, but it's there, and you know it—*you* do, *I* do, every one does. Same as Mr. Brandon; he's got it too. It's eddication, that's what it is. Times past it didn't seem to matter so much, though I don't know as it *oughtn't* to have done, but I tell yer eddication matters to-day. Eh, Missis, I've sometimes thought if I could have had eddication——"

"Well? What?"

"I dunno, not to say exactly what. Oney it's been a big drawback to me all my life, not having eddication. See? Larkins can read books an' all different to what I can, and knows about things. It makes a difference, eddication does, widens the mind."

He paused, and Nellie did not speak.

"I'll tell yer what it is, my gal," he said. "There's a lot of pleasure and a lot of good and a lot of advantage an' all in eddication, if you can get it. Same as my poor old dad. He couldn't give it to me, but I can give it to my lads, and I'd like 'em to know about geography and foreign parts and men as have done things in the world, and be able to read books different to what I can. Same as these 'ere explorer fellers as have gone out and irrigated waste land, or drained it, and found herbs and minerals and things to do people good, and invented things—and lor', *you* know! I tell yer that widens the mind to know all sorts of things, even if you've no call to do anything with 'em, oney know."

Nellie saw that the scheme for educating Sandy extended to the other boys. She thought she knew what was in his mind. "So you mean to keep him on at school a bit, do you, Dad? He'll be disappointed."

"Not at this school. They can't learn him much different here."

"Going to send him to Mr. Soundy's in Biggleswade?"

"No. I'll tell yer what I want, Missis. I want him to go to school right away from here, where they'll

learn him a different tang to his tongue, same as Larkins, and learn him same as I was saying about geography and history and these 'ere crack-brain little sums they do with letters, and learn him poetry and French perhaps, and Latin. That all widens the mind."

"Oh, Bob!"

"What, my darlin'?"

"I don't want yer to do it."

"Why not?"

"Sandy's got to farm Bentley, ain't he?"

"Of course he has, but he won't do it none the worse for being eddicated."

"I don't know so much," said Nellie. Tears gathered in her eyes and fell. She did not try to hide them or to stop them; she did not even lift her chin from her hands.

"My darlin'!" Bob said. "What is it? What have I done?"

"You've taken Sandy from me, Bob."

"I know I ain't," he declared.

"I know you have. He'll go away, and they'll learn him all these fine things, and they'll learn him to despise Bentley, and you and me, Bob."

"I know they won't then," Bob declared again. "There's no one could ever learn our Sandy to do that."

"I don't know so much," said Nellie. "He'll learn fine ways, and he'll see we've not got them, and we don't do this right, and don't do that right, and we don't know the book learning he knows. How can the

boy help it, Bob? He'll learn to look down on us. And he'll think a farmer's life ain't good enough for him; and he's got to farm Bentley, ain't he?"

"He's got to farm Bentley, of course. But I tell yer eddication won't hinder him. It don't hinder Larkins. That's oney giving the lad his chance, when I've got the money to do it. I mean same as this, darlin'—that don't give him his chance, does it?—I mean if we hold him back because of what he may think of *us*—see? I'd like to put it plain like to yer what it seems to me. I mean if we give him all we can we couldn't have done no more, could we? That won't make no difference to that whatever he thinks of us, will it? And he *won't,* darlin', not our ole Sandy won't. It seems to me one way's right, and t'other way's wrong, that's all."

She caught him to her with a little sob. "You're better than me, Bob," she said.

"*I* know I ain't!" he exclaimed.

"Ah, Bob, darlin'. You'll have to do what you think's right. I expect you *are* right. I'll—let Sandy go, Bob, if you say so."

They went back to the house arm in arm like lovers—as they were. So Sandy was sent to school.

At first he was certainly disappointed that he was not to begin work, and then, as his father talked, remote and glorious dreams began to loom into faraway possibilities. Why not become a vet and farm Bentley too? Why not be a private detective and Brocklebank of Bentley at the same time? For these

things one needed education, and education was being offered him. He never dreamed of voicing his dreams, they were far too private and too ambitious.

Nellie received from the school a list of the clothing that Sandy was expected to take with him, and she was amazed that any boy could need so large and so varied a wardrobe. She was inclined to cut it down a little, but Bob would not hear of such a thing. Sandy had three sets of every sort of underwear, knicker suits, Etons, flannels, bathing costume, gym costume, football clothes—everything. And he took the whole lot to school with him that first Christmas term—which caused considerable amusement among those who knew of it, and not a little discomfort to Sandy.

The school was a large one near Brighton, into which Sandy was received with considerable misgiving by the very excellent head master, J. C. Kettering (M. A., B. Sc., and other things). Bob had written first, and had received a polite and discouraging answer. He had gone to the school and seen him, and the two men, whose lives were so utterly different, had immediately respected and liked each other.

So Sandy went to Brighton.

CHAPTER VI

"St. George's School,
"Brighton.
"Sept. 21, 1903.

"MY DEAR Mother and Dad,

"I hope you are very well as I am very well at present. I hope Dad got home from London all right and caught his train at King's Cross. Our train did not go for about thirteen minutes after Dad went away so if he had stayed he would have missed it, besides him not liking to wait a long time over good-bys same as he said.

"I got here all right with the other boys. The boy you spoke to was Lister. He sleeps in our dorm. He has cut his thumb. He never says very much to me only what you said to him and then the boys laugh. Whenever he sees me he says, 'Look after our Sandy, he's never been away from home before.' No one calls me nothing else but our Sandy except the Masters, but the boys all call each other by their surnames except me. I am in the second form. We begin football on Friday. I need not have brought my flannels, but Matron has taken them to keep for me.

"Please tell Maurry to sell Blacky for me if he can get a good price, but not Miriam, I want to keep her I think. I hope you are all well. Lister is in our dorm. I do not like him. I hope Mother is quite well and all

the others. I hope Dad is very well. I hope I shall get a letter soon.

"Your loving son,

"SANDY."

"P. S.—There are 89 days till we go home now, there were 92 to begin with. I hope you are all quite well."

"Bentley,
"Shepton,
"Biggleswade,
"Beds.

"My dear Sonny,

"Dad and me were real glad to get your letter and hear that you were safe at school all right. Dad got home all right. We are sorry you do not like the lad called Lister. They can not all be nice lads when there are such a lot, so you must make friends with the nice ones. We are glad they call you by your name, it will seem more homelike. Please tell Matron I am sorry to trouble her keeping the flannels, tell her I will send the postage if she would rather send them home.

"We are all well except young Vickie she has got a rash teething but nothing to what Maurry had but you won't remember. Maurry has sold Black for 4/6 which is very good, and Dad has took it to Biggleswade for you and put it in the bank. We don't half miss you Sonny it is just the same as if something was gone all the time, Maurry was crying but I tell him it is silly to fret and we will have ever such a nice

time when you come home at Christmas. Your Dad says I am to tell you he hopes you did not put yourself out of the way he left you a bit sudden, only he knew you would be all right with the other boys.

"With love from us all and a kiss from your Mum, dear Sandy, MOTHER."

"My dear Mother and Dad and Everybody,

"I was very glad to get your letter and I hope Vickie's rash is better and everybody well as I am at present except I have got the headache bad to-day I don't know why. Please tell Maurry I am ever so glad about Blacky, it was decent of him to get me that price and tell him not to cry because it is no good.

"I did not like the football very much on Friday because they play it different and I did not know and they kept calling out Fowl, and then Mr. Rutherford called me out and asked me if I knew I was playing a dirty game and I said No, and he made me watch the others, and afterward he told them that I had been playing clean the way I knew, and if they had been taught that way they would do the same, and then they shut up. I like Mr. Rutherford, everybody does. He is six feet three in his socks and he plays Football like an internashonal. Most of the Masters are nice except old Webster who is a beast. A lot of the boys are like Lister and I do not like them very much. You can not make friends with the nice ones same as Mother said. They have to make friends with you and they don't.

"There are 82 days now to the holidays. Please ask Arthur to find my mouth organ and send it me. He can have my marbles or give them away if he likes. If he does not want them give them to Tommy Larkins or Maurry.

"Your loving son,
"S. BROCKLEBANK.

"P. S.—When you write my letters will you please put just S. Brocklebank on them not Master or my name or anything the other boys don't."

"Dear Arthur,

"I am very sorry you have (fell) fallen and broke your arm. We have been up that tree such a lot of times I do not know how you could come to fall. It was a good job Miss Helen saw you and helped you home because it must have hurt. Lister only cut his thumb and he made an awful fuss. It is better now. There is another boy in our dorm called Harris and sometimes he coughs at night and Lister is horrid to him and tells him to shut up. I like Harris a lot better than Lister. I will write to Mother next time. Could she send some of those black sweets from Bedford's shop? I think they might help Harris's cough. He has some stuff but it does not stop him and Lister and Barlow and some of them are so beastly.

"I got a goal at Football yesterday and Mr. Rutherford says I shape to make a player. Please tell Mother my headache is better, it is only sometimes. No please

do not write to Matron what ever you do about it. Please Mother do not write to Matron.

"Very much love from

"S. BROCKLEBANK."

"My dear Dad,

"I said I would write to Mother next time but she will not mind as this is partly about you. Did you know that Mr. Rutherford knows you sort of? Well, he does and he talked about you in history yesterday, and said that the old yeomen are in many respects the most admirable set of men in the Country. (He meant England not just the Country) and he gassed an awful lot about how proud some of us could be of our fathers, and then he said, 'I have not the pleasure of knowing all your fathers, so I'll speak of what I do know. I'm thinking particularly what a proud boy you ought to be young Brocklebank.' All the boys were looking at me and I did not know what to say, so I said, 'Do you know my father, sir?' And he said, 'I have not actually met him, I wish I had, but I have seen a letter he wrote that very much impressed me. If you grow up to be a man like your father, my son, you'll do.'

"I wish you could see Mr. Rutherford you would like him everybody does. I am sure anybody could not help liking Mr. Rutherford. Harris says will I thank my mother very much indeed for the black sweets. He did not half look pleased because I had sent for them but I am very sorry to tell you that they do not stop

his cough very much. Matron says he has got to see the doctor. Very much love to everybody,

"S. BROCKLEBANK."

"My dear Dad and Mother,

"That beast Webster sent me to Kettering for a licking on Saturday because he caught me out of bounds. I only went into the orchard to get a ball that had gone over, only the orchard is out of bounds, only I did not know you couldn't even go to get a ball. But Webster told Kettering I cheeked him because I said I had only gone for a ball as if that made it all right. I thought it did. But Webster made it sound beastly to Mr. Kettering.

"Kettering can't half lick you, I'll say that for him, but he did not give me many only hard. It was fair of Kettering, and I don't blame him, it was Webster. But I would rather have a licking than an impot anyhow.

"I am glad Arthur's arm is out of the sling and I hope it will be quite well for Christmas. Could I have a tuck box please? Harris had one and he gave me a lot of biscuits. He may leave at the end of the term. He sleeps over at the San now. I do hope he will not have to go. I am very sorry Harris is leaving, I am afraid he is. Harris always calls me our Sandy but I do not mind because he says it different from the other boys. I want some tuck to give him. I can get some at the tuck shop but that is not the same.

"Very much love from

"SANDY."

"Dear Maurry,

"Never mind about Celia Jane. I expect you have got the catch mended now so no more will get out. I am glad you caught Beauty again, and I do not mind so much about Celia Jane. Perhaps you may find her some day. I will not have Dorothy instead nor any money, because you are taking care of them for me, and if I had been at home it might have happened just the same, so it would not be fair. Besides it does not matter so never mind. I am very glad Ellen is in Standard 2 so soon, that is very good. How does Bessie get on? Dear Maurry write to me again and tell me how they all are and everything and how Mum is and everything.

"With love from

"SANDY."

"My dear Mother,

"Thank you very much for the lovely big tuck box. We had an awful feast on Saturday night up in the dorm and every one was nice even Lister. Harris has gone home so he did not get any. I am very sorry. You do make ripping tarts, all the boys say so, and they gave three cheers for you at the end by rubbing their big toes on the bed rails.

"I know how to stop them ragging me now about the way I talk. One day when they ragged me about being Bedfordshire I thought I would just show them what Bedfordshire was, so I did, and I did it broader than George Bates, and they all laughed and laughed,

made me do it again. And now if they mock me I do it and they laugh like anything. I am very glad I have found a way. We had a nice game of Football at Half Term. We played in the morning and there was a match against Rottingdean in the afternoon which we watched. The Captain is called Gregg and he came down in the morning and watched us play for a little while, and a boy told me that he heard Gregg say to another boy that that common little kid Brocklebank didn't play half badly. I have to tell you because it is such a Oner. It is not really I am conceited.

"Your loving son,

"S. BROCKLEBANK."

"Dear Dad and Mum and Everybody,

"It is only three weeks to the holidays. I do not like French. Need I learn it next term? You have to get your parents' permission if you want to drop a subject and ask them to write to Mr. Kettering. Webster teaches us French, and he mocks me the way I say it, and makes me do all my work over again. He made me do the last exercise three times instead of Football, and it was not fair because another boy called Leech got as many mistakes as I did, and he only had to do it once and his corrections three times. I do hate French. Please will Dad write to Mr. Kettering and say I must not learn it? Latin is nearly as bad, but not quite, Webster teaches that too.

"I like geography and history best and maths are not bad and nor is religious knowledge. I know a lot

of religious knowledge without learning it because it is what we used to do for Scripture at Shepton with Mr. Brandon. It is only French, but I would like to drop Latin too if you will let me.

"Three weeks to-morrow I will be home. They will light the gas for us to get up now, so it is getting near Christmas. I don't mind drawing either, a visiting Master comes with a funny voice, but I like Football best.

"It is only 21 days now. Barker has got measles. I do hope I do not get it because of the holidays. They say if you eat lots of salt you don't catch anything, so I do every meal-time. They give us Christmas pudding the last Sunday for dinner.

"Very much love from

"SANDY.

"1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 ½ These are the days. I have crossed one in half because it has half gone now."

"Dear Sandy,

"You don't want to go dropping nothing at all as they can learn you. You see son that costs a lot to get education, and I have often wished as my Dad had been in that position he could have given it to me. You want to learn all as they can learn you. See?

"Your mother and me is ever so sorry you do not like the man that learns you French but you must be a good lad and try not to get mistakes and then if you don't he won't make you do it again, will he? Stands

to sense that does, don't it? You think it over son, and see if that's not right what I say.

"Your Mum sends her love and says you shall have another parcel next week, and she says she hopes you won't catch the measles.

Your loving Dad."

"Mr. Kettering.

"Dear Sir,

"I am taking the liberty of sending you our Sandy's last letter to us which I hope you will not think you ought to say anything to him about the cheeky way he speaks about this here Webster. It will show you better than I can how the lad feels. On the face of it it don't seem as if the man treats our Sandy fair, but we ain't putting ourselves out about it, because there is very like two sides to tell if we did but know because boys will be boys even if they are our own lads, but I don't want my lad put on by no Websters nor nobody. It is not the first time our Sandy has wrote about him and seems to feel he don't treat him fair. His mother and me would take it very kindly, sir, if you would enquire how things are, as we do not want him to stop learning nothing at all, but we do not want him put on. We hope you are well as it leaves us at present.

"Yours respectfully

"Robert Brocklebank."

"P. S. I ain't said nothing at all to our Sandy as I am writing to you, so he does not know."

"Dear Mr. Brocklebank,

"Thank you for your letter and for your son's, which I now return.

"I have made enquiry (quite without your son's knowledge) into the little matter about which you wrote, and I think I can promise you that if there has been any slight unfairness (which I much doubt) there will be none in future.

"Trusting this will put your mind at rest, and thanking you for the confidential manner in which you have written, I remain yours sincerely,

"J. C. KETTERING."

"My dear Mother,

"Thank you very very much for the nice parcel. We had a feast round the fire in the second form room on Wednesday afternoon, and Lister was not there nor some of the other boys, so it was very nice. It was awfully nice of Arthur to put in the Annaseed balls. They tasted just like Bedford's shop, and I shut my eyes and thought I was there, and I will be in a fortnight—home I mean. The tarts and things were lovely. We did not eat any tea and a prefect reported us to Matron, so I had to tell, and she said, 'Oh, that's it is it? I have a good mind to report the whole lot of you to Mr. Kettering.' But she did not so it was all right. Matron is very nice and people like her only she gives you a lot of White Mixture whatever you have got the matter with you. Mr. Kettering cut his wrist last week and Leech told me that Matron gave him White Mixture, but I do not know how Leech knew that.

"Mr. Webster did not make me do my French again only the mistakes which is perfectly fair. He has not mocked me lately either, but I expect he will again soon. Only a fortnight now!

"With love from Sandy."

"Dear Dad,

"I can manage quite well over London because a lot of the boys cross over to King's Cross in cabs and I can go with them, so do not trouble to come.

"I shall get to Biggleswade at 12:15. It is only three days. I can hardly believe it is only three days, and I have only got to go four more times to bed, and only four more breakfasts, and three more dinners and teas. You will come and meet me at Biggleswade won't you? Do not send George Bates. Will Mother be able to come to Biggleswade? It is very cold here perhaps we will have snow for Christmas. I have got lots of chilblains but it does not matter.

"It is French to-morrow but I do not mind much even if Webster does mock me. It will only be two days then.

"Much love to everybody,

"SANDY."

CHAPTER VII

Bob Brocklebank drove his wife to Biggleswade station to meet Sandy. Long before the train ran into the station Sandy put his head out of the window; he was astonished at the rush of wind, he thought the train had nearly stopped.

He saw the platform, then small figures on it, then one that might be his mother. It *was* his mother! Dear homey Mother, she had come. But she did not see him. Yes, she did. Why didn't the train stop and let him get out? In one minute he would be with her.

The train stopped. She was at the door in a moment, and she was speaking. Oh, the music of her voice!

"Get your bag, sonny—don't leave your bag. Where's your cap?"

"It's—I'm afraid *it's* blown away."

A chill struck at Nellie's heart. Sandy spoke like Mr. Larkins. Oh, they had changed her boy already.

She said, "Has it? Never mind, you've come safe, so that don't matter. Where's your box?"

Sandy was out on the platform by that time. He had grown, Nellie thought, but he was rather pale and thin, he would need feeding up.

"It's in the back somewhere," said Sandy. "Oh, they've put it out. Mum!"

Nellie put her arms about her boy and hugged him.

The warm feel of her, the exquisite relief, took the strength from Sandy. He had to fight with himself not to cry, not to go to bits and sob his heart out there on the plaform in front of everybody.

"Eh, Sandy!" his mother said, and suddenly laughed happily. Bob had been right. He might go to his fine school among all his fine gentlemen, but it did not stop him being glad to see his mother. Sandy was Sandy still.

The porter took up Sandy's trunk and carried it to the float where Bob sat waiting.

"'Ello, son!"

"Hello, Dad!" Sandy climbed into the float, his face beaming. The moment of unbearable relief had passed, leaving glorious gladness.

"Lost your cap, son?"

"Yes, it blew off."

"You're a nice one, ain't yer? Go on, Pinto, my lad. Well, 'ow d'yer like school?"

Sandy had been prepared for that question. He answered, "I'm jolly glad to be home."

His mother squeezed his arm and Bob laughed at him, well pleased in spite of himself, for he had missed the boy badly. He said, "That's all right then," and whipped up the horse, and old Pinto, more used to the plow than the float, clip-clopped along the hard cold roads, round the dear familiar turns, past Stratton, past Shepton Cross, and home.

And all the time Sandy talked; he was full of football and the prowess of Mr. Rutherford, and the great

learning of Mr. Kettering and other things. Never before known to be garrulous, Sandy did not stop talking for a moment. Neither his father nor his mother had a scintilla of an idea from what suppression, from what misery, this garrulousness was a reaction. They were glad to find him so lively.

Arthur and Maurice and Ellen and Bessie had been home for dinner (administered to them by Violet Medlock) and had gone back to school. They wanted to stay at home to welcome Sandy, but that had not been allowed. So there was no one at home but Violet and baby Vickie. The baby had grown out of knowledge, and was running about the kitchen, just as Sandy used to do in days that were to him a far-off dream, and seemed to his mother as yesterday.

Nellie took the toddler up in her arms. "Here's Sandy," she said. "Can Vickie say 'Sandy,' eh? Big brother Sandy come home?"

He felt himself stared through by a pair of dark blue baby eyes. Victoria put her thumb in her mouth and sucked it meditatively, weighing up the new presence that she was told to call "Sandy." Was it nice, or was it not nice? Should she hide her face—or otherwise? Suddenly she stretched out both arms to him, smiled so that her new white teeth were all visible, and said, "An-dee!"

Sandy's arms shot out to her and took her from her mother. "She *is* a nice baby!" he exclaimed.

"She's taken to yer anyhow. Ain't every one she takes to. Bob, look at little ole Vickie with our Sandy."

"Our Sandy"—that awful appellation! Ah, well, it didn't matter here. What did anything matter at all now he was home for four long weeks?

His father had taken off his navy blue coat and the collar he had worn to go to Biggleswade, and he was tying a soft handkerchief round his brown throat. You never saw a master without a collar, or a boy either—except of course at football or in the dorm. Sandy had no wish whatever to take off his own collar, on the contrary, he would have felt uncomfortable without it. Yet Dad——

Oh, what a blessed, blessed thing to be at home! The dear old kitchen was just the same, the pictures just the same, the wall-paper, the very chairs stood just where they always did, and his mother was putting on her enveloping white apron. Baby Victoria suddenly pushed a wet thumb into his cheek; he pretended he was going to bite it, and she crowed with delight. Sandy put her on his shoulder and ran up and down the room with her.

Bob laughed. "Oh, ah," he said. "That'll be plenty good enough for her. That'll do for her all right. You'll tire before she does. You ain't half grown. Say, Missis, don't he grow, eh?"

"He does grow an' all," said his mother. "Did you get any dinner, Sandy? Dad and me waited to have ours with you."

"I had some sanwidges," he answered. "They give you some from school, but I'm a bit hungry. I didn't have breakfast."

"Did they send all you boys off without your breakfast?"

"Oh, it was there, but I cut it. I didn't want any somehow."

"Lor'! Well, come on and get your dinner then, boy, do."

Oh, the familiar scents and sounds and tastes! The very knives and forks were dear to Sandy. As he saw his mother begin to serve out the meal he had another silly uprush of emotion. He wondered what they would do if he put his head on the table and cried. It passed in a moment, and his father began to tell him about some new cows he had bought—good uns—Herefords—white faces they'd got—good milkers, this lot. But you could be taken in with Herefords if you didn't look out well. Sometimes the ones with the nice long coats weren't no good at all, just filled the eye. Sandy should see the new cows when he'd done his dinner.

He noticed for the first time in his life that his father ate noisily, that he drank gravy with a souping sound from the edge of his knife. Well, what did it matter? None of the boys were there to see. No one would scoff at him or persecute him or mishandle him for four long weeks.

His mother had prepared him his favorite pudding, treacle tart, with lots of treacle and not much edging.

"By jove!" said Sandy, "this is good, Mum. You should see the stuff they give us at school—pastry bends the spoons, and the potatoes are always slop."

"Funny sort of cook they got then, ain't they? Must be heavy-handed, else she don't put enough goodness in the pastry. And there's no need for any one to have the taters sloppy."

"Taters!" How he had suffered for that word. Oh, thank heaven, thank heaven there were none of the boys near to hear, and he was at home.

He said, "You should see the tea. Jones minor bottled some to send home to his mother, only the bottle broke in the letter bag as the prefect was carrying it out. The clumsy ass (Sandy pronounced that word 'ahss') must have knocked it. Jones minor got a licking."

"For telling his mother?" Bob asked rather sternly.

"No, for posting a glass bottle in the letter bag. Kettering said he must be a born fool. It spoilt a lot of letters."

"How's Mr. Webster?"

"Oh, all right—old beast!"

"Does he keep on putting on yer?"

"Not nearly so much lately."

"P'raps you're getting on with your French better, eh?"

"A bit—I do hate it. Ah, well, I haven't got to go to French for four weeks."

Bob laughed aloud as he got up from the table. "Come and see the Herefords," he said, and he put an arm caressingly over Sandy's shoulder as they went out into the yard. "Don't take so kindly to eddication, eh?" he said. "Lazy young hound, ain't yer, eh?"

"It's only Webster," said Sandy, "and the boys."

"Well," said his father, "if you're doing all right for the Masters you don't want to fret yourself about the boys. I was talking to Mr. Larkins, he says no boy can't settle down in one term. You don't want to put yourself out about the boys, my lad, I don't pay *them* to eddicate yer. I think yer've done ev's'well."

"Do you, Dad?" he asked. There seemed nothing else to say that he could say. His father simply had no glimmer of understanding about school. "I don't pay the boys to educate you!" Heavens above! Sandy did not begin, there was nowhere to begin. One can't explain one's troubles to a blank wall.

When the children came home there was much rejoicing. Every one wanted to show Sandy everything. He went with Maurice to look at the rabbits; they were a good family, and well cared for. Maurice had done excellently, except for the unfortunate escape of Celia Jane.

Arthur had lost interest in the frogs, which, however, had not lost interest in themselves. They had bred in the rain butt, and it had become impossible to use the water for anything at all, so the rain butt had been cleaned and purified. There were thereafter no frogs, and Violet Medlock came less delicately about the rain butt.

Arthur had a ferret, white with very pink eyes, of which he was very proud—a most dainty and dangerous little beast.

Ellen owned a rabbit given her by Maurice; and her

father said there was more fuss about that there ole rabbit than about all the rest of the farm. Ellen's rabbit had to have the exact right food at the exact right times, to have exactly the air and light and dark that it ought to have. George Bates spent a day and a half making its hutch, under her direction. She bought a book on rabbit breeding and read it in the evenings. She was just seven years old.

When the Brocklebank children went to church with their father on Sunday Sandy felt the eyes of every one upon him. He was self-conscious in his Etons, and could not be persuaded to take off his overcoat, even though the heating apparatus (still waiting the funds for repair) had taken one of its hot fits, and nearly roasted the congregation.

He knew that he was being weighed up, and that the slightest sign of "side" (we did not begin to "swank" until a later day) would damn him for ever in his native village. He tried to hide himself, but he could not be hidden, and he was greeted by many friends in the churchyard after service. Helen Brandon was waiting for him—would he come to tea that afternoon, because Daddy wanted to talk to him?

Sandy went. It was the first time he had been alone to the Vicarage, and he was a little nervous. He hoped he would do everything as it should be done. There was a little corner of his mind that felt it would be glad to show Helen and her parents that he did know how to behave.

Helen never noticed his manners at all. The fact

should have pleased him had he known it. Helen was full of her own future. She was going away to school too—to Brighton too—and there was little in her mind of other things.

"Do you like school?" she asked Sandy suddenly, when they sat together over the nursery fire, their tongues loosed by the absence of the elders. "Sometimes I'm afraid I may not like it. Is it jolly?"

"You'll be all right, Miss Helen," he said.

"Will I? Well, if I'm not I shan't stay. Do you like it?"

"I'm jolly glad to be at home," he said. That answer had become almost mechanical, and generally it satisfied, but Helen's eyes were still on him, questioning.

"Sandy, do you hate it?" she asked.

Sandy did not answer for a moment, then he said again, "You'll be all right, Miss Helen. It will be all right for you."

"I wonder," she said. "I go on the seventeenth. When do you go?"

"The eighteenth."

"Oh, I wish we were going together."

"So do I," he said, and then added truthfully, "only I'm glad I'm not going till the eighteenth."

Helen looked long at him. "I believe school's horrid, and I shall hate it," she said.

The holidays passed quickly—Christmas and New-year, with turkey and plum pudding and mince pies and parties and concerts—a time of splendor. Then Shepton school reopened, and Arthur and Maurice and Ellen and Bessie went back to their lessons, leaving

Sandy at home with a great deal of time on his hands, which he spent following his mother about the house, watching her cook, walking round the farm with his father, lending a hand where he could.

In those days he became great friends with the baby, who was always happy when she was with An-dee. Sandy took her with him almost everywhere he went as some people take toy dogs. Victoria was Sandy's toy, and his taskmaster. The devotion between them amused Nellie and touched her.

"I shan't half miss you when you're gone, son," she said, "looking after Vickie."

Victoria looked up with wide eyes. "An-dee goin'?" she asked.

"Yes, darlin'. Sandy's got to go back to school."

Victoria's dark eyes darkened. She stood on the hearth-rug, a defiant mite twenty inches high. "An-dee *ain't* goin'!" she declared.

Nellie laughed. "Oh, we've got to let him go," she said.

Vickie clutched what part of Sandy's clothing she could reach. "I will 'ide you," she said.

Sandy picked her up and put her on his shoulder. He felt old enough to be her grandfather.

The last day came. Helen Brandon was taken to school. Sandy stood at Shepton crossroads and watched the trap go by to Biggleswade. Helen waved to him, she looked rather excited and pleased with life. Ah, well, it would be all right for her.

The packing was done that evening. Sandy watched his mother's careful hands stow his possessions in the

low wooden trunk. What love was there, what anxiety for his comfort. His heart felt ready to break at the thought of the uncaring hands that would take those things out again.

When he and Arthur were in bed his mother came to say good night. She held him in her arms, and he clung to her tight. It was dreadful. He felt that his misery would burst out of him before he could stop it, and then something pulled him up—a tiny sound. His mother was crying.

Heavens, what a merciful thing he had pulled up in time! She was crying now; whatever would she do if she knew what school was like? She could not possibly bear it, she would break her heart if she knew what school was like.

She whispered, "God bless you, sonny. Eh, God bless my dear little sonny, and take care of him when I'm not there to see as he's all right." And then she let him go from her arms, and fled.

He lay staring at the door. Only a few more hours and he would have left them all again, he would be back again among those boys. He would have to go to French again, he would be sleeping next to Lister, and there was not even Harris now. Only a few more hours——

Arthur began to talk and Sandy answered him at random. When his brother had gone to sleep Sandy still lay and stared at the door.

"I can't go," he murmured. "Oh, what shall I do? I can't go, and I've got to. I've got to—and I can't."

CHAPTER VIII

"DEAR Dad and Mum and Everybody,

"I got here all right, and I am in a new dorm. Lister is in the old dorm I am glad to say. There is a new boy called Ellis in the next bed to me who is very nice, I like him very much.

"Football begins on Monday. I may be going into the choir, but I am not sure till Mr. Ashley has tested me again. There were 85 days when we came back, and now there are eighty-four.

"I got the packet of choclut out of a machine in Victoria, it's for Victoria, you see. Tell her not to forget me before I come home at Easter. There was a picture post-card of a black cat waiting for me from Miss Helen for good luck. I wish I had thought of sending her one.

"Dear Mum, do not worry, I'm all right. Very much love from SANDY.

"P. S. I keep feeling there is something I must say all the time and I can not think what it is, and yet it seems that this letter is no good without it. S. B.

"P. P. S. I have thought again, but I can't think what it is. Please write to me very quickly. S. B."

"Dear Dad,

"Mr. Rutherford has put me in the fourth fifteen,

so please may I have an extra 2/6 for the School Tie? Isn't it lovely? Ellis is in too.

"I am not in the choir. Mr. Ashley said I did not let my voice out. I don't care much. I can not somehow let it out like at home. Harris has got consumption. Isn't it awful? I should think Lister is sorry now.

"Very much love to Mum and everybody

"SANDY."

"Dear Sandy,

"I am sending you a P. O. for the 2/6, and I am glad as you are pleased to be in the football. You will perhaps be surprised to hear as you have another little brother, but I am sorry to tell you as he is not like the rest of you children. His head is been hurt, and the doctor says he will never be able to earn his own living nor do nothing for hisself. When you write to your Mum do not say anything about his head because she is fretting herself about it. I am trying to tell you not to. See? Say you are glad to have another little brother or anything as you have a mind only don't pass no remark about what is he like nor nothing of that. See?

"Your Mum does not know as I am writing except to send you the 2/6, so do not mention it when you write, except just you can say you are glad you have another little brother or anything of that.

"Your loving Dad."

"My dear dear Sonny,

"I have got hold of a pencil to write you a line but I do not want your Dad to know so do not say anything when you write as you have had a letter from me this week. I am ever so sorry to tell you your little brother is not well and strong like you other children all were. I am afraid it will be nothing but nursing with the poor little thing as long as he lives. He is a very big baby, ever so much bigger than even Ellen was. I am telling you so when you write you won't say nothing about what is he like nor nothing because your dear Dad does break his heart over him, but he is a lot better now I am pulling round, but don't say nothing at all.

"I am glad to say Vickie and all the others are well, and the comfort that Violet has been I am sure I couldn't never tell anybody. Dear sonny, we don't half miss you.

"Your loving

"MUM."

"Dear Violet,

"Will you please give these letters to Mum and Dad separately when you go to Bentley? They have both written to me about the new baby, and neither of them wanted the other to know because they are worried about him. Mother says you are a great comfort to them, and it is very nice to think that you are there. Don't let on.

"S. BROCKLEBANK."

"Dear Dad,

"Right—I will not let on to Mum you have written to me. I am most awfully sorry. It must be a big trouble to you as well as to Mum and I am ever so sorry. Dear Dad, I will work for him when I grow up.

"Your loving son,

"SANDY."

"Dear Mum,

"Right—I will not let on to Dad that you have written to me, but I am most awfully sorry. It must be a big trouble to you as well as to Dad, and I am ever so sorry. But I am awfully glad you are getting better. Dear Mum, when I come home I will help you to nurse the poor little baby, and I will work for him when I grow up. Dear Mum, I do not half miss you either. You just do not know.

"Your loving son,

"SANDY."

A little later in the term Sandy had a letter from Helen. Correspondence was supervised at her school, and she had bribed a maid to post it for her. It was a long letter, and it described vividly and forcefully the iniquities of the place, and the misery she was suffering, and her absolute inability to bear it any longer.

Helen had written many letters begging her parents to come and take her home, but she did not tell Sandy that. Her letters had not had the answer she had hoped for.

She told him that she was going to run away on the

following Thursday, and she asked him to run with her, because she was quite sure, she said, that he was miserable too. And if he could bring any money she would be glad, and she had only five and twopence, but anyhow—would he come? She was a bit afraid of walking over London alone, but anyhow—she was going.

Sandy was thoroughly embarrassed. He could not write to Helen because her letters were read by the powers that were; he could not write to her father because Helen had confided in him; he could not run away with her because—he could not run away. He owned a little money, about ten shillings, but he could not send it to her. He had no means of persuading her not to do this mad-headed thing. He could not give her away because—he could not give her away.

In his mind he hanged her many times, but he escaped to the station to meet her with the ten shillings in his pocket, at the time when she said she was going. But she did not appear, and he was caught at the station by Mr. Webster, who simply refused to believe he was not lying when he said that he had no intention of going away by train. He was brought back to the school, there to be questioned and caned by Mr. Kettering, who knew very well that the boy's silence was shielding some one, but naturally could not allow such breaking of bounds.

That evening, much worried about Helen and what might have become of her, wearied in mind and body, Sandy was sent for again to Mr. Kettering's study,

and found there not the head master, but Mr. Brandon.

Sandy gasped, and his face lit up with such joy that Mr. Brandon was touched. He rose and held out both hands to the boy.

"Well, Sandy!" he said.

"Oh, Mr. Brandon! How——? When——?"

"You want to know why I've dropped down here, of course. They sent for me to see Helen."

"Oh!" Sandy exclaimed.

"And *you* have been getting into trouble over her too, haven't you?"

"It doesn't matter, sir."

"It matters very much. I've been talking to Mr. Kettering. As a respectable parent, Sandy, of course I'm very angry with you. As man to man I'm sure you tried to do the decent thing."

"Was she caught, sir?" Sandy asked.

"Yes," said Helen's father, "mercifully she was. Apart from the naughtiness it was so supremely silly. They don't want to keep her at the school, so I'll have to take her away."

"Now?"

"No. I've persuaded them to let her stay until the end of the term."

"Oh!" Sandy exclaimed again, for he felt deeply for Helen. "I'm sure she'd heaps rather go home with you now, sir."

"So am I," said Mr. Brandon, and smiled. "I'm dead sure of that. I've refused even to go to the school again in the morning and see her. That's the only part

of the whole business that's touched the young monkey. She informed me that she didn't mind a button how much I scolded her so long as I took her home."

Sandy said nothing, but his heart almost bled for Helen. He thought that the older generation must have been born without any grain of comprehension. They were very hard.

Mr. Brandon stretched his hands to the fire. He said, "You children do put us through it."

Sandy was puzzled beyond words, and so was silent. How staggeringly unfair grown-ups were, even the best of them! Children put grown-ups through it—heavens! Then, as he watched Mr. Brandon's face a new thought struck him almost like a blow. He said, "Did you want to take her back, sir?"

Mr. Brandon exclaimed, "Did I *want?*" He smiled. "Did I? You children *are* queer fish, Sandy. Suppose I tell you all the Bentley news, shall I?"

So then they began to talk about Sandy's home and his people, particularly his mother. Mr. Brandon said she was much better. He spoke very gently of the new baby brother; he was to baptize the child the next Sunday, and George was to be his name. Victoria, it appeared, was developing into "a regular little missis!" Meddlesome little hands were in everything. Two nights before she had pulled the table-cloth from the table, and had broken five or six cups and saucers and many plates. Violet Medlock had had her hands full with her while Mrs. Brocklebank had been ill. She had climbed into the rain butt and nearly drowned

herself. She had run off by herself down the meadows and been lost for hours, and had at last been discovered by Joe Humberstone very happily playing with gipsy children down Edworth Green Lane.

Sandy almost forgot that he was hungry and tired and had been soundly caned. He was startled when the supper bell rang, and Mr. Kettering came into the study. He jumped up. Mr. Kettering smiled, he did not look like a head master at all, he was just a man. He invited Mr. Brandon to supper with the staff, he told Sandy to go to Matron's office and get a good feed, because he had missed tea.

Sandy went, cheered beyond relief, and Matron was delighted to feed him. He always got on very well with Matron. He had not known Mr. Kettering could be so human. Mr. Brandon's coming seemed to have shortened the distance between himself and home. Everything had turned out unbelievably well. In some subtle way the boys too seemed to humanize. Sandy felt happier than he had ever done in that place before.

The little affair had an aftermath. Mr. Webster stopped Sandy in a passage next day. He said, "I misjudged you yesterday. When you told me the truth I didn't believe you. I hope you still feel your caning. You very richly deserved it."

"Yes, sir," said Sandy, not knowing what to say. It was half an hour before an astonishing thought struck him. He stopped dead as he walked between his form room and the gymnasium.

"By jove!" he exclaimed. "By jove, the chap apologized!"

When he went back to his form room he took out his books and buried his whole self in his French exercise. "I *will* get it right for him this time," he muttered. "By jinking jove, the sporting chap apologized!"

CHAPTER IX

To the delight both of Helen and Sandy they met on the homeward journey. They came unexpectedly upon each other on the platform at King's Cross as they waited for the train to Biggleswade.

Helen was very joyful at having left her school, and very eloquent about its wickedness. She was completely unrepentant about what she had done and all its consequences, except Sandy's caning. That pained her very much, and as she sat opposite to him in the railway carriage she became almost tearful about it—to Sandy's amazement, and his secret (very very secret) gratification. He told her he thought she was "jolly silly," and he thought her "jolly decent"; he admired her kindness of heart which he thought must be perfectly marvelous. He admired too her strength of mind in simply refusing to stay where she was unhappy. He quite envied her the possession of such a mind—so different from his own.

And Helen liked Sandy. She felt that he had played the hero for her, and that he was very modest and very gentlemanly. She noticed for the first time that he was good-looking, with his fair, well brushed hair, his clear complexion, his blue-black eyes, his strong body and his gentleness. She understood why the Brocklebank boys, and Sandy particularly, had always been such favorites of her father.

"Sandy," she said meditatively, "if you'd lived in King Arthur's days you'd have made a good knight."

"What whole-hearted rot!" said Sandy. He did not like it.

George was a piteous object, a huge and helpless baby with eyes that seemed endlessly fascinated by the ceiling, who could not be made to look purposefully at anything. Sandy, when his mother showed him the baby wondered what on earth to say. He searched wildly round in his mind for anything pleasant, anything that would leave out of count those upturned eyes. He could find nothing to say, and his throat grew dry. His mother stood beside him, waiting. Then suddenly, instead of speaking, he threw his arms round her neck and kissed her again and again. She broke down a little in his arms.

"You've got me, Mum," he said. "You've got all us other children—and Dad."

Nellie pulled herself together and she smiled. "God knows I ain't ungrateful, sonny," she said. "I ain't done that for I dunno when. It's just you coming home fresh-like, you know. The doctor says he don't suffer at all. And he really knows me, don't yer, my pet?"

The upraised eyes turned for one second at the voice of love, and then looked back at the ceiling.

"There!" she said. "Did you see that?"

"Yes. I'm so glad, Mum," said Sandy.

"Don't talk to your Dad about him, Sandy. He's a thousand times worse'n what I am."

But Bob himself spoke to Sandy about little George. He took him for a walk to the Low Meadows, ostensibly to see the lambs, and opened the subject himself. There Sandy found that his father, though probably not "a thousand times worse" than his mother, was certainly less controlled in his distress as he spoke of "the pore little chap." Tears rolled generously down his face. So might the first Robert Brocklebank have wept.

Sandy tucked his arm in his father's. "I'll work for him, Dad," he said. "Mum was telling me he doesn't suffer. He shan't want for anything while I'm alive."

Bob was touched. Sandy stood there in the evening sunlight, tall for his age and strong, broad in the shoulder. He was verging on fifteen, and manly lines had begun to show themselves about his throat. He said, "You've got all us other boys, Dad."

Bob answered strangely, "I got *you,* Sandy."

A cold fear of he knew not what struck Sandy at the heart. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"I dunno," said his father. "That's a silly way sometimes it comes over me, I don't say but what it ain't worse'n silly. Oney sometimes when you're away that'll come over me just the same as if you're all I've got to cling to—of the children, same as something's going to 'appen to 'em, *I* dunno. I didn't ought to talk to you like this, Sandy, did I? I think it must be me getting low a bit over the pore little chap."

"But what could happen to them, Dad?"

"I dunno."

"But why on earth should anything happen?"

"I dunno."

"Well, then——"

"You ain't half right, son," said his father. "I know it don't hardly look as I'm sharp, does it?" Brocklebank of Bentley wiped his eyes as simply as a little girl who has been crying. "Silly to worry, ain't it?" he said. "That don't show no profit."

"Dad, can't I leave school and come home and help you?" Sandy pleaded.

Bob was very much himself again in an instant. "No, you can't," he said. "You're getting on fine, and I'm going to send Arthur back with you come next Christmas term."

"Oh!" Sandy exclaimed with a sudden sharp apprehension that he was ashamed of. Ah well, there was lots of time.

"Yes," said Bob, "you've got to stay three years. All you lads shall have three years. That won't come Maurry's turn till you leave. I'm thinking I can manage it fine."

They went back to the house. The children had not come back from school. Only Vickie was in the kitchen, standing near the fire, looking with satisfaction at a pile of handkerchiefs left ironed on a chair. Bob's face lit up with a smile.

"She's a rare one for a clean hankie," he said, "ain't yer, little woman, eh?" Then his expression changed.

"Missis," he called, "do you reckon you've ironed these 'ere hankies?"

Nellie came running from the dairy. "Oh!" she exclaimed, "oh, dear, they're every one of them wet and nasty. Vickie, what have you done?"

Vickie smiled, showing two perfect rows of little white teeth. "I comed," she said sweetly, "and the hankies looked so nicey, all clean and nicey, and I blowed my nose and blowed my nose till I hadn't got no more blow, and then I pit."

CHAPTER X

THE next Christmas term Arthur went to school with Sandy. He shed a tear when he parted from his mother, although he seemed to Sandy more pleased to be going than otherwise.

Sandy was filled with apprehension, partly on Arthur's account, for (as he reasoned) Arthur could have no idea of what awaited him, and partly on his own. Sandy by that time had managed to gain a foothold in the school. Though his nickname stuck to him till the day he left the sting had gone out of it. His manner and bearing compared not badly with that of any other boy in the school. His accent never quite left him, but the boys seemed to forget it, and Ellis was his friend. Sandy was in the third eleven for cricket, and the second fifteen for football. He had his promotion to the third form. His opinion counted for as much as it should have done. No one during the whole of the term before had called him common—and now Arthur was going back with him!

What would the boys think of Arthur? There was only one answer to that question. Sandy tingled with shame because he felt sick that Arthur was going back with him. He began to warn him of what was coming, shyly, nervously. Never before had Sandy been shy of Arthur. The train that carried them to London rattled through the stations, and he began.

"Arthur!"

"Um."

"They're awfully different at school from what they are at home."

"I know."

"You know! How?"

"I've watched you, and I've listened to you. It's all right."

"What's all right?"

"You needn't be afraid as I'll eat with my knife."

"That's not everything."

"Not by a long sight."

"It's the way they speak and everything."

"I know that—silly. I can talk lah-de-dah when I try as well as you. I can talk just like Mr. Brandon."

"Arthur, *can* you?"

Arthur's eyes shone and twinkled, and in a voice of artificial refinement, he explained himself. "Yes," he said, "I can. I've listened to you and to Mr. Brandon and Miss Hutchinson, and Mr. Larkins, and they all talk alike, but Mr. Brandon does it most—and Miss Helen and Mrs. Brandon. I'm going to be a parson when I grow up—no farmer's life for me."

Sandy gazed at his brother and marveled. He felt there was something a little wrong with Arthur's tone, it sounded "put on," but he was filled with admiration at the performance.

"Can you keep it up?" he gasped.

Arthur laughed. "Of course I can," he said.

And he did; also he seemed to drop into the school

life as a newly hatched duck drops into water and swims. The first few weeks were very difficult; he never moved or spoke without waiting for some one else to do it first. He imitated minutely. After the first ten days or so he rarely did or said anything that made the fact of his yeoman birth startlingly obvious. His tone soon lost its palpable artificiality. He learned with astonishing quickness what was considered "sporting" and what was not, he learned to smile when he felt inclined to swear, and to swear when such would become him in the eyes of the boys. He noted which boys were popular, and modeled himself after them. He did not spare himself. Only Arthur knew what vigilance was his, what it all cost him. Sandy paid him a tribute of admiration, almost of envy, in the midst of his thankfulness. Arthur did not become particularly popular, but he was never the butt of scorn that Sandy had been.

"That boy has brains—of a sort," said Mr. Rutherford to the head master.

"What sort?" asked Mr. Kettering.

"The sort that gets on in the world. His ability to do the proper thing amounts to genius."

"You prefer him to his brother then?"

"I? No," said Mr. Rutherford. "I've always had a weakness for our Sandy."

Toward the middle of the term Arthur tackled Sandy about his nickname. "Why do you let the fellows call you 'our Sandy'?" he asked. "They daren't call me 'our Arthur.'"

"I can't stop them," said Sandy, "I don't dare."

"Well, I do. And you could stop them if you tried. I don't like having a brother they call 'our Sandy.' "

Sandy flushed. He felt that Arthur had hit him on an old sore—and it was not fair, somehow it was not fair. He longed to point out the unfairness, but he could not find the words. He said, "I was here first."

"Well," said Arthur, "I can't help that."

"You can shut up," said Sandy, and left him.

Thinking the matter over Sandy saw suddenly (as it seemed to him) the light of truth. He had thought to be ashamed of Arthur, and it was Arthur who was ashamed of him. What right had he to be angry?

He said nothing, not being of those who need to express every thought, but the brothers' attitude to each other underwent a subtle change. They were not knit closer by it.

The subject of modes and manners was only named once again between them, and that was in the following holidays. As they lay in their beds one night Arthur began to talk.

"They'd think it jolly funny if they knew the way we live, wouldn't they?"

"Who?" asked Sandy, well knowing.

"The boys."

"What's wrong with the way we live?" said Sandy, feeling angry and hypocritical at the same time.

"What do you sham for?" asked Arthur. "You know very well what I mean. Benns minor told me he'd ask his mater if he could take me home with him

next hols, but I jolly well shan't go. I couldn't possibly ask him back here. Good lord, he'd have a fit if he saw Dad eat his dinner."

"Well," said Sandy, "I should think Dad's more to you than Benns minor, isn't he?"

"Oh, don't be a silly ass, Sandy!" said Arthur impatiently. "But of course you don't know how I feel —you've never wanted anything different, or to do anything but just potter round here and farm Bentley. I'm not like you."

Nevertheless the last night when Nellie came to say good night to them, Arthur wept freely in her arms, upsetting her dreadfully, as it seemed to Sandy. He clung to her, dumb as ever, and when she had gone he turned on Arthur.

"What are you crying for?" he asked angrily. "You know jolly well you're glad to be going back. Look how you've upset her!"

"I've not," said Arthur cheerfully and wiped his wet face. "She likes to think one minds—and I *do* mind, so there!"

Sandy turned his face into the pillow, and long after Arthur was asleep he kept it there. The next morning after he had said good-by he turned again and hugged his mother.

"Oh, Mum!" he exclaimed. "Oh, Mum!"

"Come now," she said, "you're not going to be softhearted like Arthur, are you? *You've* never minded going back."

CHAPTER XI

HELEN BRANDON was again sent away to school—to Casterton in Westmoreland. She agreed to go on a promise from her parents that she should not be made to stay if it was as bad as Brighton. It was not; in fact Helen found herself after the first few weeks thoroughly enjoying herself, and her ideas about school changed, so she stayed willingly enough.

At the beginning of Sandy's last year at school he did one of those audacious things that shy and sensitive people sometimes do, rushing in where people having normal pushfulness fear to tread. He went to Mr. Kettering and asked him if he could move up two forms instead of one and take the Senior Cambridge examination.

Mr. Kettering was very naturally astonished. No boy had ever asked him such a thing before. He looked at Sandy with twinkling eyes and asked him what in the world made him suppose that he could do such a thing.

Sandy grew red to the roots of his hair. He plunged his hands into his pockets, and then, remembering quickly that pockets are not respectful places for hands to be in, he took them out, and interwove his twitching fingers behind his back.

"I thought it couldn't matter just to ask you. I don't mean it for awful cheek, sir, really, only I thought

perhaps if I worked frightfully hard I might pull it off. You see, sir, I've got to leave in a year's time."

"Oh—yes! I remember your father said something about three years for each of you. You've been here two, have you?"

"Yes."

"Well, you can go into the Junior Cambridge Class next term."

"It—wouldn't be any good, sir."

"What's in your mind, boy?"

Sandy hesitated a moment, and then charged into his subject, his hands torturing each other behind his back. It was the first time he had ever spoken of his ambition to a living soul, and his voice sounded strange to himself.

"Well, sir, I've always wanted to be qualified as a vet—for years and years—you know I am going to be a farmer—and—I thought if I could get Senior Cambridge, and then keep reading on at home, then perhaps if Father could spare me for a little while later on when I am older, I might—I might——"

"Oh—I see!"

"You see I've only got another year, sir."

"Yes. Well, certainly the Senior *is* the gateway to a great many things. Humm! Just go and bring me your books out of your desk. I'll look them over."

Sandy hurried to his form room, his heart beating in his throat, his eyes shining. He grabbed his exercise books from his desk and hurried back to the head, who put them on the desk before him, and began to

look them through with a practised eye. Sandy waited, almost breathless. He saw Mr. Kettering's lips purse up in a dubious sort of way, and presently he closed the books and handed them back.

"I'm sorry," he said, "you could not possibly pass senior in a year's time. I'll put you in the junior class —and you'll have to work hard for that. Perhaps in two years you *might*—I'm sorry, Brocklebank, it is absolutely impossible."

Sandy was dismissed. He walked slowly back to the form room with the books under his arm, and let them slip loosely and untidily into his desk.

"So that's that!" he said.

It had been a most audacious try-on, and he knew it. He did not know, even as he stood looking at the untidy, slippery books, how he had ever dared to try it on so obviously with Mr. Kettering. He went a deeper red as he thought that Mr. Kettering might tell his form master, that the news might leak out to the boys. He had wanted this vet business so desperately badly.

Almost mechanically his hands began to straighten the books into more or less neat piles in the desk.

"So I suppose that's that," he said. This time he was not referring to Mr. Kettering's refusal to let him sit for Senior Cambs. He spoke of the probable death knell of all his aspirations. "I suppose it is," he said, "hum! Ah, well—there we are."

The future looked drear, without romance. To Bob Brocklebank there was romance in plenty in the farming of Bentley. He had remade Bentley, he had hus-

banded it through death to peaceful prosperity. Every inch of it represented struggle and victory, but to Sandy it was just ordinary. It was home and therefore dear, but it was no more possible for him to find romance in the farming of it than to fall in love with one of his sisters.

Since he had been at St. George's he had encouraged himself to dream dreams, feeling that there was some hope of their coming true. Naturally at sixteen he did not visualize himself tracking de Wet through Britain, but he did see his own hands performing neat operations, he did imagine himself diagnosing diseases that puzzled the country, perhaps finding the cause and cure of lamb fever, and the future had glowed golden.

He made one more effort to reach his ambition during the following holidays. The family was walking over the fields to church on Christmas morning. The path was narrow, and took two abreast only, and that, in parts, awkwardly. Sandy was near his father.

He said, "Dad, am I leaving school in the summer?" He knew that that was the program, but he approached the subject lamely.

"That's a fact you are," said Bob, "and Maurry's goin'. Are you glad, eh?"

"Well, I was wondering if I could possibly stay on another year," said Sandy.

Bob stood in the path and stared at him. "Wot for?"

"I—I could take Senior Cambridge then," said Sandy hurriedly. "I mean if I get through junior this year."

"Take Senior Cambridge? Wot's take Senior Cambridge? Do yer warnt me to send yer to Cambridge, Sandy? Because——"

"Oh, no, no, no!" Sandy hurried to explain. "It's the exam, you know—Senior Cambridge, if you can get it with maths they take it instead of other exams like Matric and Little Go. It's a sort of first examination for heaps of professions and things."

They were on the broad road by that time. Sandy found himself walking between his father and mother.

"Profession?" said his mother. It had come—what she had always known would come since Bob insisted on sending the boys to Brighton. Oh, the folly it had been! She felt it was time to strike hard, to flatten out Sandy's notions once and for all. She spoke hardly, feeling it was for his own good.

"Profession? What do *you* want with a profession? You can leave that to your fine gentleman friends at school. You've got to farm Bentley, Sandy."

He flushed, he felt the warm blood tingle all over his body. Oh, that he had never spoken! His mother's words struck him with a shame he felt it was not fair he should be made to feel. He said:

"I never meant not to farm Bentley, Mother."

"Oh, you didn't, didn't you?" said his mother, "that's a good job."

His father spoke not unkindly. "Yes, farming's your line, son. But—wot a-meanter say, sonny, were you thinking perhaps I might send yer to one of these here agricultural colleges or something?"

"No," said Sandy. He looked sullen, but he felt tormented. Oh, that he had never spoken! If only he could get away! The church bells rang over the field and seemed to echo on the road.

"Agricultural college!" said his mother scornfully.

"Because," said Bob, "I'd thought of that myself, Sandy."

Sandy looked up at his father, suddenly and strangely comforted.

"But—I've figured it out and I can't afford it, ole son—wish I could, I'd send yer not 'arf I wouldn't!"

"That's awfully good of you, Dad," said Sandy, and, as he said it, he put away finally his dreams and ambitions. If his father could not afford to give him more education, well, there it was.

"Sandy don't want to go to college to farm Bentley, Bob," said his mother. "You've farmed Bentley better than your very grandfather, and you ain't been to college, nor he hadn't neither. You can learn Sandy all there is to know about Bentley, better than a college can learn him." She turned to Sandy, "I should have thought you'd be wanting to come home and help your Dad," she said, "you're a great lad now, sonny, and should ought to do a man's work very near. Why, you'll be going on seventeen come the summer."

"I know," said Sandy.

"Well, then!" said Nellie. "And George Bates is getting past it. Stupid as an ole hen he is at times. Me and your Dad'll be glad to have you at home. College indeed!"

"I didn't think of going to college," Sandy burst out; "I thought of reading up at home to be vet and farm Bentley as well. It doesn't matter."

"Well, I never!" said his mother. "There's more to do at home than sitting reading books, as you'll find out, Sandy."

"Of course there is," said Sandy, "I didn't mean——"

"*You* don't want to be a vet," said Bob. (They were nearing the church.) "There's no call for you to be a vet. You can always get the vet from Biggleswade if one of the beasts is bad."

"I know," said Sandy. "Oh, *please,* it doesn't matter."

They went into church. No one ever spoke of the vet idea again, except once.

At the end of the summer term Sandy left school.

CHAPTER XII

SANDY BROCKLEBANK, when he left school, stood five feet ten in his stockings; his back was strong and his limbs were straight; his hair was still fair, though darker than it had been. Two straight lines, that threatened to become deep, were growing from his cheeks to his chin. They made his face rather striking even as a boy. During his first year on the farm he gained the two inches that he lacked from six feet.

Nellie was proud of him; she herself had contributed this tall strain to the stock of Brocklebank. Sandy worked well and learned much. Both his mother and Bob had forgotten that he ever had that silly notion about staying on at school.

"Our Sandy's took to the farm real well," said his father one night as he climbed into bed beside Nellie. He tucked his big arm round her and chuckled. "Now, what say to eddication, darlin'? Ain't spoilt our lads, has it? And it's widened their minds—widenin', eddication is."

Nellie kissed her man. "I think they'd have been just as well without it," she said. "Specially Arthur."

"Oh! Ah! Arthur!" Bob exclaimed non-committally.

"That won't do Maurry no harm. He's got a nature like Sandy's, but our ole Art always had ideas; when

he were small he had. Same as Ellen. I hope you ain't for eddicating the girls, Bob, are yer?"

"Well, I dunno," said Bob so sheepishly that it was plain he did know.

"Now then, Bob!" his wife exclaimed. "You know very well the best our girls can do for theirselves is to marry some nice lad and settle down. You'll turn them into fine ladies if you ain't careful, and then who'll want 'em? Who'll they want?"

But it appeared that the girls themselves had opinions. Ellen insisted on being made into a teacher; nothing would satisfy her but that she should go to Bedford and be trained. She fought for what she wanted with a persistence that astonished Sandy and made him dumb. He did not know whether he envied or admired or condemned his fourteen-year-old sister. All he knew was that he could not possibly have done what she did. He contrasted his submission with her fight.

"Can't afford" carried no weight with her.

"You can afford it for the boys," she said, "heaps more than I'm asking for. I've won a scholarship, and it's only my clothes and pocket money and books I'm asking for. It's beastly horribly unfair."

"For shame, Ellen," said Nellie, "to speak so to your Dad. You should know yourself better. You'll just do as you're told. You never asked us if you might go in for the scholarship, and you'll just do as you're told."

"I won't come home and slave away like Violet

Medlock, and you can't make me. Every one at school says I've got brains—better brains than any of the boys. Oh, it *is* unfair!" She wept. She did not mind in the least what weapon she fought with.

In the end she got her way, and very daintily clad and geared went she to Bedford. Even at fourteen Ellen could make dainty clothes. She seemed able to do whatever she turned her brains to. She could not sweep a room or cook a pudding—she did not want to.

Bessie did. Round, short, rosy Bessie had no other ambition than to help her mother. She loved indoors and indoor work, and she looked as fresh as a meadow daisy. Her eyes were brown, like her mother's, and her mouth buttoned sweetly at the corners. She had no greater pleasure than in the holidays to cook the men a dinner they really enjoyed. She loved George tenderly. She could keep Victoria out of mischief—at least when she was with her, and no human being could do more. Ellen marveled that Bessie could pretend to be happy in the holidays "slaving away." Bessie did not pretend, she was bubbling with happiness. She had neither the guile nor the wit to pretend anything, if she had wanted to.

It was always taken for granted that Arthur, when he left school, would help on the farm. There was plenty to do, and moreover the lease of the Bury farm (Larkins' farm) was falling in. Bob longed to add to Bentley; he had always longed to do so, ever since so many years ago under Mr. Lee's pilotage, he had paid off the last pound of Bentley's mortgage.

Larkins himself intended to buy part of his farm, but not all. Some of the Bury fields joined Bentley on the southeast; they lay low and lush, good for cattle, except two of them, where wild onions flourished among the grass. Bob, naturally, did not want those two, but he did want the others; they would mean more pasture and more cows. He had a great idea of sending milk to London, for he had already almost too much for his local customers, and with more pasture—and Arthur coming home—

He talked it over with Sandy one night, as they sat in the kitchen, both smoking pipes, the others having gone to bed. Bob talked all farm matters over with Sandy; he made a point of it.

"About these here Bury meadows, Sandy—do you think we ought to take them on, if they don't fetch too much?—It's them damn' little onions——"

"There are only two bad meadows, aren't there?" Sandy asked.

"Ah, but the ole birds *will* fetch the seeds over. Larkins told me. Has to keep the spudder going, you know, to keep the good pasture clean."

"Well, we can keep the spudder going then, can't we? But couldn't we plow up the bad land, and clean it?"

"Clean them onion medders?"

"Yes."

Bob laughed. "Ever talked to any one about getting shut of wild onions, Sandy?"

"No."

"You do. If you broke yer heart cleaning them you'd never be shut of them. Seeds ain't no bigger nor a poppy, you know. No, if we buy we've got to face it, son. And I believe they'll be artful enough to put them two medders in the same lot with some good land—else they'd never sell them at all."

Sandy said musingly, "You wouldn't think a cow would eat such bitter things as those wild onions, would you?"

"Nor such hard things as iron nails and clothes pegs and tin cans!"

Sandy laughed. "I suppose if they do eat a bit it tastes the milk more than buttercups."

"Thousand times more. Milk ain't no good at all for two or three days—no good for nothing at all."

"Well, then, shall we not buy?"

"Eh, son, but I *should* like them two beautiful medders down there—always green——"

Sandy went with his father to the Swan at Biggleswade where the auction was held. It was the first auction he had ever seen, and he was puzzled at the beginning of it to know how the auctioneer knew when people had bid, and once created a sensation by getting a twelve-acre field knocked down to him—a field that Mr. Larkins himself was determined to buy, and all his neighbors were determined that he should have, at a price the auctioneer considered not good enough for his client, who was some "foreigner out London way" whom no one cared a button for.

Sandy, half a head taller than most of the men, was

listening fascinated to the auctioneer's flow of words, admiring the way in which he strove to start the bidding at a figure that brought no response from Larkins, when, catching the man's eye, he smiled. Down came the hammer, and Sandy, for a moment or two, in which he grew hotter and hotter, found that he had done an amazing thing. The farmers gasped, and then they laughed. Some one explained that it was a mistake, it was not a bid, that Sandy was "oney eighteen." They laughed good-naturedly at Sandy and at the auctioneer. The lot was put up again, and knocked down to Larkins at his own price.

Then came the two meadows Bob wanted to buy, yolked together very naturally with the two that he did not. He got them at a price that was cheap for the good land, dear for the bad. It was the best he had ever hoped for, and he was content.

Almost thirty farmers had lunch together that day at the Swan, Bob and Sandy with them. The clatter of knives and forks and tongues reminded Sandy of school, but the smell of ale that mingled with the roast beef and greens was as unlike St. George's as was the talk of crops and horses and markets.

Sandy wondered what the boys would think of it all; but he felt himself lifted above the boys and their petty concerns, into the world of men—men who did things and counted for something. He could not help wishing that some of them would not let each mouthful of beef and greens and potatoes be both heard and seen. He tried not to look at Norman Lee who sat

opposite him. Norman was a nephew of the old man Simon who had given his father such valuable help years ago. Norman was a very good fellow with a large mouth and long teeth. He laughed a lot too. It was quite horrible, and Sandy could not escape him. Bob souped up gravy with his knife with great relish. It was red, just how he liked gravy. A great many of them were thirstier than, possibly, they might have been if their wives had been with them.

They shouted joyously to one another across the tables. These were his people—his! The boys were an incident, this was his life. These were his own. He drew them, as it were, into his heart, and loved them with their beef and greens and beer and their brave manly friendship. Let the world go—these were his.

They began to chaff him about his bid, good-naturedly and loudly, laughing at him. Sandy laughed too; he looked shy and different and very boyish, for all his height. He had no idea he was a favorite with them. He felt that he had made an ass of himself, and was adding to it by blushing like a girl. But they liked him for his shyness and his queer humility among them, although he had gone to a fine school and got book learning. Bob knew, and he was very proud of his son's popularity, very proud of his tall son.

Arthur's home-coming was the thing that Sandy and his father talked of as they drove home from Biggleswade behind a sleek shining young roan in the gig, which had succeeded poor old Pinto and the float as a means of human transport at Bentley.

"Shall we give our ole Art some of the farm work, Sandy, and you see to the London milk?" Bob suggested.

Sandy had the reins; he always drove when he and his father were together. "If you like," he said. "Or —I don't think Arthur's awfully keen on the farm work—he might like the London business better."

"Ah!"

"And you see, I know quite a lot about the farm work now."

"That's a fact, you do, son. You surprise me sometimes."

Sandy glowed. "Do I, Dad?"

"Not half, and that's a fact, son."

"Well, you'd have to teach it all to Arthur."

"Ah, but that wouldn't do him no harm to know, you know. That never does yer no harm to learn things, even if you ain't going to do nothing with them, oney know."

"Well, if you think he'd better, I don't mind, Dad."

"I've written to a man or two, would be glad of our milk, Sandy. But of course we've got to stock and do, and we ain't half got to fence the good land. Don't, we shan't have a bit of peace from them fields with the little onions. Larkins ain't half let the hedges go. Suppose he thought the next man could see to them. Don't know as you can blame him neither."

"It'll cost a lot then."

"Ah! Don't know as we could do it, oney being as Arthur's coming home there won't be two boys to pay

for at school, and he'll be earning his living, paying me back as you might say, same as you're doing yourself, son."

They lapsed into silence, and then Bob said, "Let's see, what day is it they're coming home? Day after to-morrow, ain't it? Then he'll have one more term. That'll give us time to fence and stock and do, Sandy."

They were nearing the farm, and it looked warm and mellow in the sunlight. They had to pull up to let the cows cross the road from the pasture to their sheds, and sat still in the gig watching the gentle comfortable beasts with their sleek sides and switching tails and homey, cowy, smell. Old George Bates followed them and shut the gate.

Peace brooded like a benediction over Bentley. It filled Bob's heart, and he looked his son in the eyes.

"Didn't I orter be thankful?" he said. He added in an awed voice, "Cord! What have I ever done to have all this for? Don't seem hardly right that I should have all this, does it?"

And Sandy, eighteen, and six feet high, put an arm over his father's shoulder and hugged him. The caress astonished them both. It brought a sudden sting of tears from Bob's full heart to his eyes. He said, "You ain't half a good lad, Sandy."

As they drove into the yard Nellie came to meet them, leading by the hand a very disheveled Vickie. She was six years old. Her pinafore and her stockings and her little legs were torn; her face had a long red scratch; she was covered with mud; she was howling.

"There!" Nellie exclaimed. "I told yer I should show yer Dad when he came home. Now, tell Dad what you've been a-doing."

"Fell—in—the pond," Vickie sobbed.

"Yes, but what were you doing to fall in?"

"Getting—blackberries."

"Blackberries?" asked her father. "Ain't hardly ripe yet, are they?"

"S-some are."

"Tell your Dad what you were doing to Maggie Geeves."

"F-fighting."

"Fighting! Oh, Vickie, why?"

"She—she w-wanted the blackberries, and I wanted them. And she pushed me in the p-pond."

"I'm afraid you and Maggie Geeves must be nasty rough little girls," said her father severely. "Fighting!"

"*I'm* not," said Vickie virtuously. "She is, and I won't never play with her no more. I saw the blackberries first. But when I got out of the pond, I pushed her in—anyway!"

Sandy turned suddenly to attend to the horse. Bob looked at his small daughter for a moment, trying to find suitable words with which to reprove her, but finding none, he suddenly threw back his head and laughed, and Sandy exploded too. They filled the yard with hoots of joy, and Vickie, ceasing to weep, stood and stared. Poor Nellie was outraged and scolded them both.

"You're bad as the child together, you two. You make her a thousand times worse'n what she is."

Vickie was hurried from the scene, and Sandy and his father unharnessed the horse, and wiped their eyes.

Sandy took the roan to the stable to rub him down. Usually Vickie, like a terrier dog, followed him everywhere he went about the yard and garden. He missed her for a moment, then chuckled again, and feeling that life was good, he lifted up his strong, somewhat untuneful voice in song. It was a gay and amiable roar. He could certainly "let out his voice" at home even if he had not been able to do so at school.

"When we are married we'll have sausages for tea,
Sausages for tea,
Sausages for tea——"

"And very nice they are too," said a voice in the doorway. "You shall sing that epic in the Albert Hall, Sandy."

"Miss Helen!" Sandy cried, and dropped Joe's foot. "Have you got back for the holidays then?"

"No," said Helen sweetly. "Obviously I'm still in Westmoreland."

She stood framed in the doorway, bareheaded, and dressed in a white dress, short-sleeved and slim waisted. She held out her hand. Sandy spread his own.

"I can't," he said, "I'm too dirty, all over hot horse."

"Rubbish," she said, and took his great hand in her little one, and shook it.

Sandy thrilled. Something in him was stirred and excited and exhilarated. He laughed at nothing very obvious.

She said, "What a huge thing you're growing into, Sandy."

He said, "You've grown—beautiful."

She snatched her hand away. "Goodness," she said. "Surely we're not going to begin paying each other compliments. We know each other far too well. What were you laughing at just now?"

"Vickie. She's a terror. Did you hear us?"

"Hear you! My goodness!"

"Have you been in the house?"

"No."

"I'm so sorry. Come along."

"I'd heaps rather just stop and talk, Sandy. I've not seen you for such ages. When do the boys come home?"

"Day after to-morrow."

"Let's have some picnics or something."

"Let's. We can as soon as ever we've finished harvest. I mean I can come with you."

"We're not going without *you!*" Helen exclaimed. "Indeed not."

That new something in Sandy glowed, and his eyes were shining when they went into the house. His mother saw it, and she wondered about it a great deal.

CHAPTER XIII

OCCASIONALLY Sandy went to Bedford, and when he did so he made a point of visiting Ellen at her school. He knew the joy of seeing a familiar face when one is surrounded by strangers, and he saw plainly that she was delighted when he went. In spite of differences he generally got on very well with Ellen.

He would have liked, whenever he visited her, to have hurried her out of the school to the river or to the café or wherever they were going, but he was not allowed to hurry. He was always kept lingering about passages and gateways on the school premises while she "just spoke" to this girl and that. It never struck him that he was being shown off; it never entered his modest head that more than one of the sillier sort imagined themselves in love with him, and that round his big person many day-dreams were woven.

Ellen knew of course, and she enjoyed the possession of such a brother. She would not have let him know for the world—not for the John Cary scholarship itself—that she kept him waiting in passages and gateways in order to give certain supposedly love-lorn maidens "a chance."

Later, even a very little later, Ellen was heartily ashamed of this stage in her career. There was a girl in the school called Lucy Lowood, a doctor's daughter, sporting, downright, outspoken, even to the point

of rudeness, loyal with a fervid fierce loyalty that left one gasping, a girl who cared little for dress or tidiness, and yet on matters of social etiquette, on the pronunciation of words, on the use of phrases, was so point-device that she appalled the uninitiated. It was in her a form of flagrant snobbery.

She talked about the "sort of person" who does this and that. "So-and-So, oh, all right up to a point, you know, but she's the sort of person who pronounces sugar, 'shugger.' " "So-and-So! Oh, my dear, he's the sort of person who folds his table-napkin if he has only one meal at your house. Calls it a serviette, I don't doubt."

And this girl became Ellen Brocklebank's special friend. Ellen, herself a great stickler for the niceties ever since those early days at Shepton school when she had refused to spit and rub her slate, admired Lucy greatly. She loved to be spoken to, as occasionally she was by Lucy, and told that such a one was the sort of person who did this or that. It implied that Lucy took it for granted that Ellen was not that sort of person. Ellen purred under the treatment. She wondered what Lucy would think if she knew what sort of people her father and mother were. No, she knew.

Ellen played up to Lucy. She told her one day that some new mistress was the sort of person who said " 'erb" instead of herb.

Said Lucy, "But *that's* all right. You can if you like. Lots of really nice people do say 'erb."

Ellen was nothing if not quick-witted. She rose to

the emergency. "Of course you can. I didn't mean anything—only she *is* that sort of person. *You* know."

Lucy answered that she did, and Ellen breathed again.

Her next venture might have been disastrous to all further friendship. She told Lucy that the games mistress, having got a fly in her mouth, had spat freely. "I didn't think she was that sort of person," said Ellen. "It made me feel quite sick."

Lucy's eyes suddenly flashed, and her tall body seemed taller. She said, "Miss Garmstone is a friend of mine."

Ellen flushed, hesitated and then said the only thing she truly felt, "I'm sorry." She turned dolefully away. She thought she had offended past forgiveness. She did not know that in Lucy's eyes her apology had been precisely the proper thing.

Thereupon began a very real and tremendous friendship. The realization that they were twin spirits came gradually. They both worked hard, being ambitious, but in their spare time they discussed many things, and discovered that they thought alike on such large subjects as work, service, generosity, self-sacrifice, God.

They became "the sort of girls" who do not "bother about boys," who get on with their work and their games and their swimming and their own jobs.

Sandy found that he was never more kept waiting for Ellen. She became the sort of person who does not keep one waiting. He was glad of that, but he never got Ellen to himself, she was always accompanied by

Lucy, whom Sandy found it very hard to like. He could not understand what Ellen saw in her. There was certainly none of the gentle come-hitherliness that there had been about Ellen's first friends at school. Lucy and Ellen would not allow themselves to be helped in and out of boats on the river, they would never allow him to carry their coats or their parcels, they objected to being paid for in cafés. Lucy was friendly enough to Sandy. She liked him—but she could very, very easily do without him, and the fact was patent. Sandy began to feel that the girls set themselves out to be nice to him. He was the third in the party of three.

Ellen's first ambition when she went to Bedford was to become a teacher, her next was to take a degree. She knew that to do so she would have to win another scholarship. She had had hard enough work to compass Bedford school, she knew that she could not pass on to higher things without a scholarship. She was aiming for the John Cary for Cambridge at the time when Lucy happened to her.

Naturally the girls discussed their careers, and it appeared that Lucy also meant to be a teacher, but not of the same sort as Ellen; she meant to combine social service with the fulfilling of her ambitions.

"I'm going to teach the blind," she said. "Father's a doctor in Liverpool, you know, and he's doing an awful lot of work among the blind. I'm sure he'd get you taken on if you'd go in for it. Why don't you?"

Lucy wrote to her father and told him about Ellen,

and Ellen, at his invitation, wrote too, with the result that ten days later Ellen knocked at her head mistress's door and announced that she had decided not to go in for the John Cary; she was going to try to get a Liverpool bursarship to train for teaching the blind.

It was only after everything was arranged that she told her people of her changed plans. It had never struck her to tell them before; she had never thought of doing anything but carrying out her own career. It all came to light quite casually during the next holidays.

Bob was rather fond of teasing this ladylike finikin young daughter of his. He said, "When are you going to bring off this 'ere fine scholarship, eh?"

Ellen looked up from her plate (they were at tea) and said, "Scholarship? Oh, the John Cary? I'm not trying for that now. Lucy's father is a doctor in Liverpool, and if I can get a bursarship he'll put me in for training as a teacher of the blind. That's what I'm trying for now. I've chucked the John Cary. I'd rather be with Lucy."

"Teacher of the blind?" Nellie exclaimed.

Said Bob, "Well, I should have thought you would have asked your mother and me before you get deciding what you'll do and what you won't do."

Ellen was astonished and really sorry. It was quite a new aspect of the situation. She said, "I—I didn't know it would matter. It won't cost you any more, not a penny."

And Bob was hurt at that, and Nellie was angry.

Sandy saw both sides, and felt for both. He envied Ellen's independence of spirit. He resented it too.

"That don't matter whether it does cost me or whether it don't cost me," said Bob, for once in his life roused to anger. "You ain't going off Lord knows where without a word to your mother nor me, so you can put that in yer pipe and smoke it, my gal. Who is this Lucy you're so struck on?"

Ellen reddened. "She's an awfully nice girl. Her father's a doctor in Liverpool—I told you. Sandy knows her, don't you, Sandy?"

Sandy answered in a monosyllable. "Yes."

Bob looked at his son and was not much drawn to the unknown Lucy. "What's she like?" he asked.

Sandy answered, rather unconvincingly, "She's all right." But Ellen had risen to her feet, and her eyes were flashing in a true and faithful imitation of Lucy. She said, "She's a friend of mine, Father!"

Bob gasped. Nellie said, "For shame, Ellen! For shame to speak so to your Dad!" It was a real scene. Violet Medlock disappeared into the dairy. Bessie subsided into tears. The two boys, home that day from St. George's, bore the scene as they could. Arthur smiled in an attempt to suggest that it was amusing and not painful, Maurice, red and miserable, scarcely lifted his eyes from his plate.

Bob clenched his fist and brought it down with a bang on the table. He shouted at his daughter. He certainly was "the sort of a person who raises his voice." Ellen, with her head thrown back, and her

whole body quivering with fear and hurt and defiance, noted the fact.

"And if she worn't a friend of yourn, should I be troubling myself about her, Miss? I'll make what inquiries I've a mind about your friends. Sit down."

Ellen sat, and Bob turned again to Sandy.

"What's she like?" he asked again, and Sandy answered as before. He wished, for Ellen's sake, that he could sound enthusiastic.

"Do you like her?" his father asked.

"She's all right, Dad, really," he answered.

"What's wrong with her?"

"Nothing."

"You ain't struck on her though."

That was a statement, and Sandy could not deny it. He did his best. He said, "She's quite a nice girl, Dad, really."

"Sandy!" Ellen burst out reproachfully.

"Hold your jaw, Ellen," said her father.

"I do think you're mean, Sandy!" Ellen exclaimed. "I've always stuck up for you." Her face quivered; she was fighting, not quite successfully, with tears.

A silence followed. Bob was cut to the heart. He hardly knew for a moment what hurt him so. "Stuck up for you." So his children "stuck up" for one another—against him, did they? He drank down the last few mouthfuls of his tea, got up and went to the door where hung his cap. He put it on and opened the door to go out.

Then he turned. "If you're so dead struck on this

'ere girl—Lucy Whatsername—why ain't you never brought her 'ome with yer?"

Ellen did not answer. Arthur's eyes brightened. He knew all right.

"Because I'll tell yer this, my gal, unless you do bring her 'ome with yer, and let's have a look at her, and see if she *is* all right, same as Sandy says, you shan't go to Liverpool to be a blind teacher or whatever it is. So there you are." He looked at his wife. "That's right, what I say, ain't it, Missis?" he asked.

"That's right," said Nellie. "Your word's law in this house, Dad."

Bob went out and shut the door after him. There was a moment's uncomfortable silence. Then Ellen got up from the table and fled. Some hours afterward Arthur found her in the little wood in the Low Meadows. She was sitting on the ground with her back against a tree, and her eyes were red and swollen.

He flung himself down beside her. "Poor old girl," he said. "Poor old kid!"

"I do love her, Arthur," the girl whispered with a sob.

"Perhaps it won't make any difference if she does come," he said.

Ellen shook her head. "Lucy's *gone* from me," she said. "Everything's gone now."

And Arthur, who was to make a much more terrible scene before the holidays were over, patted her hand.

CHAPTER XIV

"Bentley, Shepton,
"Biggleswade,
"Beds.

"Dear old Lucy,

"A horrid thing has happened, and I wish I could talk to you—as it is I must write. My people object to my taking up teaching the blind. I don't know why, and I don't think they do, except that they don't know anything about it. I had not the faintest idea that they would mind—not a flicker—but Father flared up at me at tea last night, and there was an awful scene. The only one who is really nice to me about it is my brother Arthur. I thought Sandy would have backed me up, but he did not—at least only so half-heartedly that it was worse than useless.

"My dear, they want to see you, so that they can see if you are the sort of person I ought to be friends with. There! That's saying it right out—but we always do to each other, don't we? It is very ridiculous, Lucy. You have no idea how ridiculous it is. Will you come? If you don't, or if they don't like you, they are going to stop my going to Liverpool. I am not trying to wrap it up, because I'm too miserable. I've wept quarts. I am to ask you for the week-end. Come quick, because I can't wait like this.

"Your miserable

"Ellen B."

"Rodney Street,
"Liverpool.

"My dear old ass,

"Why be miserable? Of course I'll come. Of course your people want to know what sort of people you are going to live amongst. Small blame to them. I hope I pass muster. I'll try to be nice, and I'll be on my very best behavior, and I'll put on my nicest clothes, and I'll promise to arrive without a hole in my sock. For my life I can't see what you've got to cry about. After all I've not got feathers instead of hair, or two left feet or anything of that sort. I'm generally considered more or less right in the head and physically sound. I bet you anything I'll pass. Anyhow I'll do my damn'dest. Cheer up!

"Your old pal,
"LUCY."

But Ellen found it hard to cheer up.

The new meadows, the fencing, the London milk orders and the onions were much discussed at Bentley. Ellen said they had onions every meal—and between meals. She made a parody on a parody, and sang it.

"There is a farm I know,
Not far away,
Where they have onions
All through the day.
Oh, how the children yell
When they hear the dinner bell—
Oh, how the onions smell,
All through the day!"

Bessie was rather horrified. "It *is* wicked," she said, "to make fun of a hymn like that."

"It's not the hymn, you noodle," Ellen told her. "It's Dad and Sandy—and Maurice. Arthur's not so bad."

"It would be more to Arthur's credit if he *did* show more interest," said Arthur's mother.

It was the first comment that had been made on Arthur's lack of interest in Bentley's new meadows. It seemed, somehow, only decent to take his interest for granted, and his father did so take it. It was settled that Arthur should "see to the London milk." Bob looked upon this as a tremendous opportunity for his second boy, a chance any young fellow would be glad of. He thought, certainly, that Arthur might show a little more gratitude about it, but he supposed that the boy did not understand. He would soon get over that when he had been at it a week or two, and had learned on which side his bread was buttered. Bob did not worry about it. He knew Arthur had ability.

But Sandy was a little troubled. He and Arthur were down in the new meadows one September evening, the light falling warmly on the fading grass, and he put a question to him.

"Arthur, I say, don't you *want* to do this London milk?"

"No."

"Rather come on the farm in the ordinary way?"

"Lord, no. I'm not going to do that."

"What then?"

"I—I'm going to see Mr. Brandon. I have an appointment on Monday night. I can't say anything till then, and please don't question me. I am going to seek spiritual advice."

"Seek sp——"

"I've said I don't want to be questioned, please." Arthur's tone was annoying beyond words.

"When do you say you're going to see Mr. Brandon?"

"Monday night. I told you."

"Oh! Then I suppose you'll allow us to know your lordship's intentions the day after?"

"That night. You're being pretty beastly to me, Sandy."

"Am I, old chap?" he asked. "I'm sorry. You rile me horribly sometimes."

"You rile me too."

"Yes," said Sandy thoughtfully, "I bet I do."

Ellen drove Joe in the gig to meet Lucy at Biggleswade. Her body tingled with a sort of numb despair as she held the reins. She tied Joe to some railings outside the station and went on to the platform and waited. The train came, and Lucy got out of it. She was dressed in a smart navy blue coat and skirt in which her tall figure looked very well, and she came along the platform to Ellen beaming.

She was delighted with the gig. "How country!" she said. "How topping! Ellen, do I look nice? I've tried so hard to make myself look nice—at least as nice as nature will let me."

Nature had been very generous to Lucy. She had given her dark curling hair and rather wonderful dark eyes, and a perfect skin, in which her lips and cheeks shone brightly red, but Lucy liked fair people, and had no idea how generously she had been treated.

But it was not Ellen's fault she did not know, she had told her friend often enough. She said, "You look just topping."

"Well, you aren't much bucked about it," said Lucy.

"Lucy, you're going to have an awful shock."

"Am I? Why?"

"I'm not going to tell you. You'll see. But—but—Lucy——"

"What, old dear? What's the trouble?"

"Lucy, they're my people, and—and—I adore them. I love them all frightfully, just frightfully." Ellen's voice shook ominously.

"Well, why in the world shouldn't you?"

Ellen did not answer, and they spoke of other things. In Bentley's yard Ellen delivered Joe to old George Bates, and took Lucy into the house. Her mother, apron clad, clean and buxom, was coming out of the dairy as the girls went into the kitchen.

Ellen said, "Lucy's come, Mother."

Nellie held out her hand and smiled very kindly. She said, "How are you, my dear. Are you tired after your long journey? I'm ever so glad you've come. We've heard so much about you from Ellen."

Lucy smiled too. "It's awfully nice of you to ask me. I'm so glad to come."

Nellie summed Lucy up quickly. "Not a bad girl," she thought. "Bit ikey perhaps. Might be ever so much worse. She's got a real good face, and she's pretty. I wonder Sandy didn't say she was pretty."

Bob came in. He shook hands with Lucy and said very little. He hung up his cap and jacket on the pegs beside the door, and took his collar off too, and rubbed his hand around his brown neck. "Ah! That's better," he said. "Got a cup er tea, Missis, eh?"

"That's just on ready," Nellie answered. "Ellen, won't you take Miss Lowood up-stairs and show 'er 'er room? Tea'll be ready time you come down."

"Mayn't I be Lucy?" asked Ellen's friend.

Nellie smiled. "Well, of course you may, if you'd rather, my dear."

The two girls went up-stairs. Lucy's room was low and long and very clean, and smelled of farmhouse and lavender. There was a big half tester bed in it, chintz-curtained, white-counterpaned, very inviting.

"Oh, how pretty!" Lucy exclaimed.

Ellen leaned on the end of the bed and buried her face in her hands. Lucy shook her by the shoulder. "What's the matter?" she asked.

Ellen did not answer.

"Ellen!" said Lucy sharply. "Don't be an idiot."

"Do you—do you—want to be friends with me—any more?" Ellen looked up at her, her gray eyes full of misery.

Lucy flung her away. "No, I don't," she said, "if you think I'm such a hateful, beastly, disgusting

snob——" her voice broke. It was the first time Ellen had seen her upset, and she had not realized she could be.

"Lucy!" she said, and caught her arm.

"Oh, Ellen, don't you know I *care*—awfully—for you—for our friendship? It's crowds more important than any little—— Besides, oh, Ellen, they're *your people,* and I'm sure they're splendid. I—I'm not such a hopeless snob I don't *know* I'm probably not fit to black your mother's boots. She—she looks so kind and beautiful——"

They were both crying by that time, hugged up tight in each other's arms, crying, but happy with a new and tremendous possession, something very warm and precious, even sacred.

Lucy was the first to recover. "For mercy's sake," she said, "let me blow my nose and wash my face and appear down-stairs like a decent visitor. Whatever will they think? *Two* of us in floods. How idiotic! Pour me out some water, there's a cherub, and do make yourself look respectable. They won't like me if they think I make you weep the minute I get here. And they *shall* like me, they just *shall.*"

Lucy was a success. She insisted on taking her share of the washing-up, of the bed-making, of the dusting. She rode old Pinto, she learned to milk a cow. She played cricket in the croft with the boys and Ellen and Vickie. She went to church sedately with the family. She was very kind to George and very compassionate; it never seemed to strike her to feel that he was repul-

sive at all. She talked to Bob about animals, and learned a great deal from him that she never forgot, for she was much interested. She talked to Bessie and her mother about recipes, and Ellen was astonished to find her knowledge so great. She went a long walk with Arthur, and they got on famously. Even Sandy found himself unbent on the Saturday evening when Lucy sat down at the old yellow-keyed piano in the front room, and hammered out tunes they all knew, and songs they all could sing. It was a jolly evening, although George rather spoiled it. He slobbered so that night, and made weird noises from the chair in which he sat huddled up.

On Monday morning Bob took Lucy's hand and shook it. "You can come again whenever you've a mind, my dear," he said. "You're welcome."

The girls were very happy.

That evening when Vickie and George were in bed, the rest of the family sat around the kitchen and Arthur came home from the Vicarage. He hung up his hat, the white straw hat with the school band, and came to the table. There he stood and made his announcement.

"Father, I've been talking to Mr. Brandon. I've got something to tell you, and I hope you'll be pleased. I want to take Holy Orders."

"You want to—*what?*"

"Take Holy Orders, Father—be a clergyman. I've always wanted to, and Mr. Brandon says if I really feel the Divine Call I ought to tell you."

"The Divine Call! Time enough to think about Divine Calls when you're a man, ain't it, Arthur? You're oney in your seventeen. They don't make parsons outer schoolboys, do they?"

Arthur was pained. "No," he said. "One can't be ordained until one is twenty-three, of course. But it's a career that must be trained for like any other career." He paused. "It is the very highest career," he informed them.

There was a moment's vibrating silence.

"What d'yer want to do then?" asked Bob.

"I want to stay on at school for a year or two, please, and then go on to college and take a degree, and then one has to put in three years at a theological college. So, you see, I'm not beginning a bit too early."

"That's a fact you're not!" Bob exclaimed. "That *is* a fact, that is!"

"I know you want me to come home, Father," said Arthur hurriedly, flying before the storm, "and I would, indeed I would, if I did not hear the Divine Call."

"Um. Sandy wanted to do summat or another instead of coming home. What was it, son? Be a vet or summat, wasn't it?" Bob smiled indulgently at his first-born, and Sandy went white.

"Oh, vet!" Arthur exclaimed, and dismissed the paltry ambition. "This is a very different matter, Father."

"It is an' all," Bob said. "But I've just got this to say to you, my lad. It's all very well hearing Divine

Calls to go and spend a lot of money, but what are you going to do when you ain't got it?"

"Father! But you have!"

"I ain't, Arthur. I'm been and bought them new medders, and ordered the fencing and the sheds and the stock—as you might say. With you coming home we can manage to pull through till the London milk begins to pay us back, but I ain't got the money to keep both you and Maurry on at school just now, and that's a fact. If you wanted to hear Divine Calls, my lad, I wish to goodness you'd heard 'em before I spent all me money. Well—I don't say but I ain't got a few pounds put by for a rainy day," (he was annoyed to find himself confessing to his little umbrella) "but I ain't a-goin' to spend that for Mr. Brandon nor no other man on this earth, so that's said it."

"Not for the Son of Man in Heaven, Father?"

Sandy suddenly jumped to his feet, his face white and his eyes blazing. "Shut *up,* you young beastly blighter!" he cried.

Ellen spoke, flushing very red. "If Arthur does feel God's call," she said, "*I* think he's perfectly right to speak out."

"And you shut up too," said Sandy. "Who cares a hang *what* you think?"

Ellen thought, "Lucy does." She did not speak. She had stuck up for Arthur who had been decent to her, so she had done her duty.

Nellie spoke. "I think Dad and me will talk this over by ourselves," she said quietly.

"Ah," Bob agreed, and gave her a look of much love.

"I certainly think it would be better," said Arthur virtuously, and Sandy damned him under his breath.

Maurice spoke shyly. "Dad, if it would help, can I leave school instead of Arthur? I couldn't do the London milk I expect, but I could soon do a man's work on the farm—nearly. And then—if you would teach me—and Sandy could do the London milk——"

"You've oney had a year at Brighton," said Bob.

"I know, but I mean it doesn't matter—sort of——"

"That does matter then. I've always treated all you lads alike, and I'm always going to. That wouldn't be fair on you, Maurry."

"I shouldn't mind, Dad, really. I mean—if it would help, sort of. I mean if—if" (he flushed furiously) "if—God does want Arthur—I mean—we *can't*, can we? I mean if *I* stood in the way, Dad, it would be so awful, wouldn't it? And it doesn't matter nearly so much for me—sort of——"

There was a moment's silence. Then Sandy said. "I'm going to bed Joe down. Coming, Maurry?"

The two boys went to the door, and Bob ordered the other son away. "You puddle off too, Arthur," he said, "and Ellen and Bessie, you take your hook an' all. Go to bed."

Outside the door Arthur spoke. "Shall I come and help you, Sandy?"

Something was burning in Sandy, something that he had never felt before, and he spoke, hating dreadfully. "No," he said, "you go and listen to Divine

Calls to take Dad's savings and Maurry's education, and to follow your own damned hypocritical selfishness, and to use God's name to do it with. Go off and keep your dainty hands clean. Don't come near me."

"Sandy," Maurice whispered, "Sandy, don't!"

"You're blasphemous," said Arthur, and turned away.

The next day Mr. Brandon came to see Bob. Arthur had been at the Vicarage telling them how his announcement had been received.

He found Sandy directing the unloading of the wood for the new sheds.

"So you don't like Arthur's wanting to be a parson?" the Vicar asked.

"I don't care what he wants," said Sandy. "He can want whatever he likes as far as I'm concerned and try to get it too. It's this Divine Call to do it that sticks in my gizzard."

"A Divine Call is the only thing that justifies making a parson, Sandy."

"There's only his word for it."

"There can only be his word for it."

"Yes," said Sandy. "That's where he knows he's absolutely got Dad. Oh, it's clever."

"I shouldn't have thought you'd have taken up this bitter attitude, Sandy," said the Vicar. "But if it's his work you're grudging, I must say I don't see why the young man shouldn't put in two or three years at home. Do him no harm, quite otherwise. I'll put that to your father."

"I'm not grudging his work, believe me. *I* don't want his work. I shouldn't grudge him anything if I thought——" he stopped.

"If you thought the Call was genuine?"

Sandy hesitated. "If it were Maurry now, he *is* a sterling little chap if ever there was one. Now, if *he* said——"

"My dear boy, *you* can't be Arthur's judge. To his own Master he standeth or falleth."

A retort was bursting behind Sandy's lips. He wanted to say (quoting the great detective whom they both admired) "life has its little compensations." But he did not say it.

Arthur did not come home to work for two years, or for any time at all. He got his own way. He pointed out that there were other boys at school who meant to be clergymen, and they had studied "Latin and Greek and things" since they were about nine years old, and he had not begun until he was fourteen, and he was fearfully behind.

"A large number of good men in our ministry don't begin 'Latin and Greek and things' until they are much older than you are, Arthur," said Mr. Brandon. "Some of them are business men, and have to start all over again, after years of no study at all."

Arthur smiled frankly and humbly. He said, "It must be awfully hard, and they must be fine men. I'm sure *I* could never manage it."

Bob stirred in his chair, settled his shoulders and made his decision. "If Arthur's got to go in for be-

ing a parson, he's got to go in for it," he said, "and he might as well do it properly. He'll never content hisself about the farm, and Maurry will. I want no grudging work from any one, let alone me own boys. If his heart's in this business he'd better go. I shan't make him come home. That wouldn't show no profit for him nor for me nor nobody else."

"Oh, thank you, Father!" Arthur exclaimed. "*Thank* you!"

"What will Sandy say?" the Vicar asked.

Bob said slowly, rubbing his chin, "Ah, our ole Sandy! He *is* a good feller now, Vicar, our ole Sandy is."

Arthur felt a little shriveled. There was almost an implication that he was not a good fellow—he who felt drawn to be a clergyman! Ah, well, he was going to be a clergyman anyhow, the rest mattered little compared with that solid fact. He determined that whatever Sandy said he would not quarrel with him.

A picnic had been arranged for that afternoon with Helen Brandon, and the thought gave Arthur considerable pleasure. His visits to the Vicarage had shown him a good deal of Helen, and he liked her now that she was almost grown up. He thought that her northern school had improved her very much and that she was quite decidedly pretty nowadays. Sandy had promised to drive them all to Bedford, and the program was to hire a boat and have tea on the river.

He wondered whether Sandy would refuse to go as he was a member of the party, and he almost hoped

he would. He himself was, of course, perfectly capable of driving Joe to Bedford, and Sandy was an uncomfortable companion at the moment.

Sandy did refuse to go. It happened when, after dinner, Arthur asked him if he should harness Joe, and Sandy told him to please himself what he did.

"Do you mean you're not coming to Bedford?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I shan't go either then," said Maurice.

"You'll be jolly rude to Helen then, both of you," said Arthur stoutly. He refused to take the place of the one in the wrong.

"You go, old man," said Sandy to Maurice. "You'll enjoy it. Go on."

"Oh, Sandy, do come," said Maurice.

"Better not," said Sandy, and went out to work on the wood for the fencing, Vickie, like a little dog, at his heels.

So Arthur and Maurice harnessed Joe and went without him. Sandy felt happier when they had gone. He was glad that Arthur was not to be forced to come home. He felt he could not have lived with him grudgingly working about the place with his Divine Call to be a clergyman rankling in his breast. He was glad that Maurry (good little old Maurry) was to be home with him. He would enjoy having Maurry very much. He would try to make it up to him all he could for his sacrifice; he would give him a good time at home.

He worked away measuring and sawing, growing happier with the physical exertion, enjoying Vickie's chatter. She sat cross-legged like a gnome on a pile of wood and talked incessantly.

Suddenly he heard the clip clop of Joe's feet; he looked up and saw the gig returning. It drove up the lane, and Helen jumped out and came to him.

"Why aren't you coming?" she asked without preliminary.

"Don't feel like it," he answered.

They ignored Vickie.

"Rubbish," she said. "You're sulking because Arthur's going to be a parson. Don't be a baby. You won't have to go to his church."

Sandy, in spite of himself, smiled.

"You needn't ever listen to him," she went on. "None of us need, thank heaven! If it were your father now, wanting to be a parson, you *would* have something to be sore about. You'd have to go to his church."

"By jove, I'd love to," Sandy said, and laughed. "Dear old Dad, I'd love to hear him have a shot at a sermon."

"Clergymen never ought to marry, Sandy, their wives and children have to go and listen to them, and that's why clergymen's children turn out so wicked. They die of spiritual starvation."

"I say!"

"Well, I only mean they know all about them—grease spots on their waistcoats, and if they ever lose

their tempers or eat too much at Christmas-time—things like that. There ought to be a law forbidding clergy people ever to attend their own parson's church—but of course if they weren't allowed to marry that would settle it absolutely. Don't let's ever let Arthur get married. I shall tell him."

"Do," said Sandy.

"It's not that Daddy isn't a darling, for he is. Are you coming?"

"No."

"I'll come," Vickie volunteered.

"No, you won't, young woman," said Sandy. "I'm sure Miss Helen doesn't want to be bothered with you."

"I do—if you'll come, Sandy.—All right, *be* a baby and sulk. I'll go home too. It's very selfish of you, because I do want to go. So does Vickie. Please come, Sandy dear."

He went. They had to wait while Bessie washed and changed Vickie. It did not take her long, being, as she was, very much practised in the gentle art of tidying her small sister.

The child went out of the house jumping and shouting and waving her arms with glee. She was collected into the gig on Maurry's knee, and they swung away behind the long strides of the roan.

The black mood lifted from them all. Helen did not seem to understand that a terrible thing had happened. She talked so freely about Arthur's becoming a parson, she teased him so mercilessly, that it became possible

to speak of it without tragic seriousness. It became a lighter matter. It seemed possible that life (even such life as had been) might still go on with some serenity even though Arthur was going to be a parson.

And Arthur took Helen's ragging very well. It appeared that he had no wish to be considered different from other mortals, not in any way more sacred or unteasable. Sandy softened; he thought that quite possibly he had been too hard on his brother. And Arthur really had behaved very unresentfully to him. Still—a "Divine Call"—however, forget it, forget it.

He thought that Helen was a perfectly dazzling person, so jolly and such a dear. Even the Divine Call mattered very little when she was there. Her presence somehow gave him immunity from the growing cares of life; it held him in suspension above them.

They had tea on the river. They hired a punt, and Arthur lay on his back and paddled them down the stream. They drank tea under a great tree among many gnats. Helen poured out from a thermos flask, which was not large enough for their thirst. So Arthur paddled them back to buy lemonade in bottles. Vickie, having failed to get the marble in her bottle in the right position, and scorning a teacup, emptied a flood of lemonade down her front, and was dealt with by Helen with Sandy's big handkerchief, and then demanded another bottle.

They lay about a while under the trees until they decided that the gnats were too hungry, and came off the river, and drove home in the gathering dusk.

An unadventurous picnic—yet somehow delightful. A weight was lifted and gone. The brothers looked each other in the eyes again.

Arthur and Maurice got out at Shepton Cross and took Vickie with them. Sandy drove Helen home to the Vicarage.

"I *have* enjoyed it," she told him.

"So have I," he said. "More than anything I ever remember, I think."

She lifted her eyes to his. "So have I," she said.

The very clip clop of the horse's hoofs was sweet in Sandy's ears as he drove home.

CHAPTER XV

In a few days the boys went back to school, Maurice for his last term, and the fencing began to grow about Bentley's new meadows, and new cowsheds began to be built on to the old. It was almost completed before the boys came back, but the new cows were not to be bought till the spring.

Maurice began to work at once when he came home, and learned a great deal while Sandy was still about the ordinary farm work. The family much enjoyed having Maurice at home. Was it Robert Louis Stevenson who said that in a day's march it is better to find a happy person than a five-pound note? A happy person to live with is worth more than hundreds a year.

He added to his farm work several hobbies—one was the further instructing of Vickie in the rearing of rabbits for profit. He built her hutches from wood left over from the Low Meadows fencing, and Vickie was thrilled. She was a very apt pupil. And he still kept his amiable habit of planting flowers. He dug up a piece of waste land on the other side of the lane from the house, and planted flowers there—violets and polyanthus and canterbury-bells and wallflowers and stocks and asters.

Bob watched him, smiling indulgently. "Reckon you're a-making us smart, don't you, sonny?"

"You don't mind, do you, Dad?"

"Mind! Cord, s'think I don't. If that pleases you that don't hurt me, son, nor nobody else."

Said Bob to his wife, "He's another Sandy, our ole Maurry is. He don't half take to work, the lad don't. Sandy will be pretty near free for the London milk time we get the stock."

They were a fine lot when they came, those cows—blue and white from Suffolk, with splendid udders and well filled sides—great milkers, those blue and whites.

A new float was fitted up with two sets of cans, and Sandy took charge of it; also, under Bob, he had charge of the new cows, and an extra man was hired to help him, Len Stocker, a sturdy youth of twenty-two.

In those days of the early establishment of the London milk business there was more to do on Bentley than there had ever been even in the flourishing times of Brocklebank's Bedfordshires. Nellie saw all three of her men tired out, and wished that the new meadows had never been bought.

"What d'yer want to do it for?" she asked Bob one evening. "We were right enough. What d'yer want to do it for?"

Bob would have been glad enough to tell her, but he could not find the words. He could not explain his ever soaring ambitions for the farm he loved. He sounded impatient when he spoke, but he was only inarticulate. He said, "Lor', where have me slippers got to? My feet don't half ache."

It was no answer to Nellie's question, but she never asked it again, and before very long the extra work fell into the daily routine and was taken for granted.

Sandy always looked forward to the school holidays, not because Arthur came home, but because Helen did. In about a year she was sent to France to finish her school-life. That was just at the time when a great change came to Bentley. Violet Medlock, the girl by the day, got married.

Violet had been at Bentley ever since Vickie was born, and they missed her badly. The whole family went to church to see her married, and Bob, because the girl had no father, gave her away. Vickie quite literally lifted up her voice and wept, upsetting Violet badly. She clung to her outside the church and begged her not to go; she was inconsolable for many days, and followed Sandy about, more than ever like a little dog—a woebegone wee dog with its tail between its legs, and when Violet settled in her cottage in Shepton Vickie was almost as much there as at home.

Bentley imported no other girl, by the day or otherwise, for some years, for Bessie turned fourteen and left school. Bessie loved her housework and her cooking, and her mother found her very easy to teach. A comfortable little person, Bessie, and her ability to make other people comfortable was wonderful. She was the least brainy Brocklebank of them all, as sweet and wholesome a girl as ever grew up in the country, white skinned, pink cheeked, with fair straight hair, and strong little white teeth in her pretty mouth.

After the manner of the Bessies of this world she acquired a young man almost as soon as she left school, a steady staid boy called Bert Jinn, one of the numerous family of sons of a small farmer in Eyeworth. They neither of them ever had a thought of love for any one else. Bert Jinn used to come for Bessie and sit in the kitchen nursing his cap until she was ready to go out with him. They went their walks together and returned in good order about nine o'clock—never later unless they had been to some rare social or a concert in the schoolroom in Shepton. They never seemed to be excited or exalted or unhappy, unless there was some reason for their being so that concerned everybody else as well. The course of their true love ran as smooth as the top of a polished table, and it was just about as exciting to watch.

Neither Bob nor Nellie made the smallest objection to this early courtship. It seemed to them the most natural thing under heaven. But Ellen disapproved of it. She thought it very wrong that Bessie should be "stuffing her head with boys" at her age. It was the sort of thing that simply was not done either at Bedford or Liverpool, so far as the Ellen-Lucy circle was concerned.

She asked Arthur what he thought of it. Like the rest of the family he had let the comings and goings of Bert Jinn pass without comment.

"Oh, I should leave her alone," he said. "We've just got to put up with things like this and make the best of it. You be content if you get your own way

about yourself, my girl. You can't rule the happy home, you know."

"I don't want to rule it," said Ellen, "only——"

Arthur's eyes twinkled at her. He said, "I think you do."

"Gracious!" Ellen exclaimed. "Do I?" The thrust shot home. She said, "Thank you very much for that, Arthur."

"True, eh?"

"Horribly. I won't forget. You're a Power, Arthur."

"Power?" he asked.

> "Oh wad some power the giftie gie us
> To see oursel's as others see us!"

"Gad, you're a sporting kid!" said Arthur.

In due course Helen came home from France, and prepared to settle down at home, but, being full of health and energy she looked around for something for her hands to do.

"I'd rather find it for myself than let Satan," she told her father. "I can't sit on a cushion and sew a fine seam, and I hate housework. I may start writing some day and turn into a Charlotte Brontë or an Ethel M. Dell or somebody. That would startle you, wouldn't it, Daddy? I think I'll start a girls' club in Shepton. Shall I? They seem to start going about with boys when they're about thirteen, and there's nothing else for them to do."

Her father and mother approved of the girls' club idea, and she went away for a month or two to train at a social center, and came back full of zeal, and began.

The first item on her program was a concert to raise funds, and Sandy and Maurice helped with the planning of it, with the manual work of erecting a platform in the schoolroom, with the carting of chairs, with the carting also of various "artists" from Biggleswade. They had a great deal of fun out of that concert that was not set down on the printed program. Every one who has ever arranged a concert in the country knows of the many adventures and misadventures to go before and follow, the frenzied zero hour before the pianoforte solo that invariably opens the show, of the bad tempers and the gales of laughter that go to make it all up. These things draw together very closely the promoters of the possibly execrable entertainment, and if these promoters are young and happy they may easily hurry on the process of falling in love.

Helen's concert was a success, at any rate financially, but there was difficulty in getting a room for the club to meet, and Sandy (of course with Bob's permission) partitioned off a part of one of Bentley's barns, and had it cleaned and whitewashed for Helen's club.

So the girls came every week to Bentley for their meeting, and often during the week too Helen was at Bentley, seeing to this and that, holding extra classes

for drawing or brushwork or first aid or singing. She threatened Sandy that she would make him come in and teach the girls singing.

"At any rate," she said, "you could make noise enough. What about lifting the rafters with *Goodbye, My Bluebell* or *Sausages for Tea?*"

Sandy declined with many thanks.

The club made good progress. In time they actually bought themselves a second-hand piano for the club-room. Helen grew keener and keener. The club became with her almost a whole-time job, and she was oftener than ever at Bentley. Sometimes she stayed to meals at the farm, and almost every day Sandy in his work about the place would meet her and talk to her, and often walk home with her over the fields when his work and hers was done.

One autumn evening as they walked to Shepton along the narrow muddy path in the gathering dusk the crisis came. The first nip of frost was in the air and Helen shivered.

"Ugh!" she said. "Isn't it cold?"

"Are you cold?" he asked anxiously. "Here, put my coat on." He whipped off his coat, and stood in his shirt-sleeves, putting it round her.

"Goodness, no!" she exclaimed. "Put it on again at once, Sandy. You'll get cold and die of pneumonia or something."

He laughed.

She wriggled out of it. "No, really," she said. "Some one might see us."

"Well, let them. It's a jolly sight more important that you should be warm."

"But I'd hate them to see us."

"Oh, I'm sorry." He put the coat on again.

"Sandy," she said. "I told you years ago you'd make a good knight. You're a darling, and I love you for it."

"Oh!" he cried, "oh, I wish you did!"

"Oh, goodness! Don't be silly. I didn't mean——"

"No, I know you didn't. That's just the point." He caught her hand. "Helen, could you ever——? You couldn't ever——?"

"Why couldn't I ever?" she asked.

"Helen!" he cried. "Can you——? Do you——?"

"Oh, not yet, Sandy, not yet," she said. "Not yet. Let me grow up first."

"When will you be grown up?"

"Well, most people are grown up when they're twenty-one."

"Oh, Helen, Helen, shall I have to wait till then?"

"Yes."

"But I may ask you again then?"

"Yes. But, Sandy, I'm not saying——"

"I know you're not. Eighteen months. Oh, Helen, you've just put me in Heaven."

"But you're not to let things be any different, Sandy. I shall be awfully unhappy if you let them be any different. I do love things so just as they are. I'm so awfully happy with them just as they are. Promise—faithfully——"

He promised. He said, "I—I didn't think you'd look at me."

She smiled at him. "Didn't you, Sandy dear?"

They found it difficult to meet, the next day, as if nothing had happened, but they did their best, and as the days went on their meetings became easier and easier. No one knew that anything out of the ordinary had passed between them, but fierce is the light that beats upon the inhabitants of a village. Although Sandy and Helen imagined that no one watched them, their interest in each other was public property in Shepton before any one at the Vicarage thought of it at all as a love affair. Mrs. Brandon had a shock when on a day one of the maids spoke casually of "Miss Helen's young man," and (at her exclamation) answered with the sincerest wonder, "But Miss Helen's been walking out with Sandy Brocklebank ev's'long, ain't she, Mum?"

Mrs. Brandon spoke to her husband about it. She was distressed and anxious, afraid to speak to Helen, knowing that her headstrong daughter was quite capable of marrying Sandy forthwith, if she opposed.

"Whatever shall we do?" she asked her husband.

"Why, nothing, I suppose," he said.

"But we *can't* have Helen getting herself talked about like this!"

"One can't avoid being talked about in a village, darling."

"No. But—a boy like that! She can't marry a boy like that."

"Can't she?" he asked, and smiled.

Mrs. Brandon found his smile exasperating. "I wish you wouldn't pretend you don't know what I mean!" she exclaimed. "It's a serious matter."

He sat down on the arm of her chair and drew her to him. "No," he said, "I mustn't pretend. But wouldn't it be dreadful to interfere with things that matter far more than social values, for the sake of social values? Supposing Helen—cares? I mean—we just *know*—about that—don't we, sweetheart?"

Mrs. Brandon looked at her man, and sighed. "Oh, dear!" she said.

He spoke of Sandy's personal worth, his education, his gentleness. He asked her, how could they, to whom God had with such mercy given each other, say that their daughter "should wed no man who was only good to God and nothing more"?

He got his way—the meek of this earth being so terribly strong. His wife kissed him silently, and her eyes were wet. In a moment she spoke again. "Well, I'm just going to hope there's nothing in it," she declared.

The Vicar put back his head and laughed.

Lucy came fairly often to Bentley, and it was almost inevitable that she and Helen should at some time meet. Ellen was quite anxious that they should do so. They met—and Lucy Lowood loathed Helen Brandon at the first encounter. It was an astonishment to Ellen. She had taken Lucy to speak to her at the end of some club meeting, and had asked Helen

in to supper with the family. Helen had accepted the invitation, and Lucy and she had been perfectly polite to each other.

Afterward, when Helen had gone, and Sandy had discovered that he was obliged to go to Shepton and had gone with her, Ellen asked Lucy how she liked her.

"Like her?" Lucy repeated. "Affected piece of goods. Pretty enough."

"Oh, Lucy!" cried Ellen who had never heard a breath against Helen in her life. "I don't think she's affected—really."

"Friend of yours?" asked Lucy.

"Well, not particularly of *mine*. We've always known her, you know."

"H'm."

"What don't you like in her? I don't see."

"Shallow as a puddle, or else I wrong her," said Lucy.

And on the field path Sandy and Helen found themselves confiding to each other that they were not attracted by Ellen's friend.

"Slangy sort of girl, isn't she?" Helen said. "I wonder what Ellen sees in her to be so gone on."

"Well, to tell you the truth, I've always wondered that myself," said Sandy. "Mind you, I like her heaps better than I did, but I simply can't feel keen. It's strange you should feel the same."

"We often feel the same about things, don't we?" Helen commented.

Days afterward when Lucy had gone home, Ellen, blundering innocently, told Sandy of Lucy's aversion.

"Wasn't it queer? Lucy didn't like Helen a bit."

"Oh, didn't she!" Sandy exclaimed. He felt it a great impertinence in Lucy to have an opinion about Helen at all.

"No, she thought her affected. I don't think she's affected. Do you?" For some reason Ellen did not say the word "shallow," she felt restrained.

"No, I jolly well don't," said Sandy, "and the dislike was mutual anyhow."

"Mutual? Was it? What did Helen say?" It was Ellen's turn to feel indignant, but her indignation was tempered with amusement. Of course if the dislike was mutual it was rather funny.

"Oh, I don't know. She didn't say much. Just didn't feel drawn to fall on her neck or anything of that sort."

"How funny!" Ellen exclaimed. "I thought they'd like each other a lot. You never can tell, can you?"

"Oh, it never struck me that they'd hit it off much."

"Didn't it? You're shrewder than I am, Brother Sandy."

"Not I!" he laughed, but his opinion of Lucy went down because it had been confirmed by Helen, and Ellen thereafter looked at Helen with a critical eye, because Lucy had criticized.

CHAPTER XVI

In August, 1911, Helen Brandon turned twenty-one. Arthur had had his twenty-first birthday earlier in the year, but not much notice had been taken of it. His father had given him five pounds. He had given Sandy five pounds on *his* twenty-first birthday. He still tried to treat all his boys alike.

But Helen on her birthday gave a party, out-of-doors by moonlight in the Vicarage garden. She had dreamed of it for years, and had dreamed of such a night as it was, warm, with a brilliant moon. The summer of 1911 was one long sunburned drought—it was cruel for farmers—it was excellent for maidens turning twenty-one who wished to give parties by moonlight. The only Brocklebanks invited were Sandy, and Arthur, down from his theological college for the long vacation. Ellen would probably have been there, but that she was staying at West Kirby with Lucy.

Helen's party was a great success. She looked very pretty in diaphanous pink. A brass band from Biggelswade played on the raised ground under the yew trees near the house, and light streamed from the French windows of the drawing-room, golden across the moonlit lawn. A scent of ten-week stocks filled the air, and the night was perfect.

Everything was perfect, and Sandy, who had wait-

ed bottled up for many months, proposed to her again. After supper they strolled away into the orchard, and Helen turned to him confidentially. "Sandy, *is* my party going well? Do you think people are enjoying it?"

"Rather! I've heard lots of people say what a jolly party it is. They must be absolute mugs if they're not enjoying it."

"You happy, Sandy?"

"Frightfully. I mean that word. I'm so happy I'm frightened, Helen!"

"What? Oh, Sandy, *no!*"

"No, what? Are you grown up now, Helen?"

"Yes. But—oh, not to-night, Sandy!"

"Why not to-night? I've waited all this time, I can't wait any longer. Helen, will you marry me?"

"Oh, don't spoil to-night."

"Helen, won't you? Can't you—don't you—like me?"

"Yes, I like you tremendously. You know I do, you *know.*"

"Well, then——"

"But it's not enough to marry on. Look, Sandy, I've thought an awful lot about it since you first asked me. Of course I knew you'd ask me again, and I knew I'd have to decide. I'm sorry it's come to-night, but it has, and there we are."

"Oh, Helen!"

"Don't sound so broken. Look, I'll have to tell you. It will probably cure you of wanting me. I care a

lot for you. No, leave me alone a minute, let me finish. I mean—it's like this—if any one told me you were dying or going away for ever or something like that, I don't know what I'd do."

"You'd mind?"

"Oh, terribly. And if marrying you didn't mean living at Bentley, I would—— But you've always told me you've got to farm Bentley, haven't you?"

"I see," he said very quietly. "I ought to have known. I'm sorry I'm a farmer, Helen."

"No, no, no! You don't understand. I'd farm anywhere with you. It's not the *farm.*"

"Well then, my dear——?"

"No. It's no good. It simply isn't any good. I'm not capable of it. I'm not good enough. It would mean marrying your family, Sandy, and I can't, I *can't!*"

She burst into tears, and Sandy put an arm round her, a muscular arm that shook.

"I'll ask Dad to build us a little house, Helen. It wouldn't mean that, dear, it wouldn't. I'm certain Dad would build us a house."

"Even if he did your family would be all on top of us, and Sandy, all these people here—all my friends—they'd never want to come and see me. It would mean cutting myself absolutely off. It would be all right if your family wasn't attached, but it would be, it would be!" She shook with sobs. "Oh, I feel like the scum of the earth," she said. "I *am* the scum. You're heaps and heaps too good for me, Sandy. But it's never been any use trying to do what I *know* I can't. When

I was at Brighton I knew I couldn't stick it, and I couldn't, and I ran away. It was best. I'm running away now, Sandy. I might make a heroic effort for a few weeks, but I know, I know myself too well. I'd better run away now than later—and I know I couldn't bear it. If you'd only leave Bentley——"

"I will leave Bentley," Sandy said quietly.

Helen stopped weeping, and looked at him. *"Will* you?"

"Yes, I will," he said. "Dad's got other sons. Why should I be indispensable? Arthur can go off and do what he likes. Why shouldn't I? There's Maurice. Helen, would you go to Canada or Australia with me?"

"Like a shot."

"But you'd leave—all these people then."

"No, I shouldn't. Not in the same way. Any one can go to the colonies and farm nowadays."

"It might be frightfully lonely."

"I shouldn't care."

"There might be only me."

"I shouldn't mind."

"By jove, Helen, you must—care—a lot."

"I do." She smiled at him. "I wonder if you really care enough for me to leave Bentley for me?"

"Helen," he said, "I've hated Bentley since before I left school. Bentley has hung round my neck all my life. I've never been able to do anything I've wanted to do because of Bentley. I'm not going to let Bentley rob me of you. I'm not!"

"What will they say?" she asked.

"I don't know."

"Will you ever dare to tell them?"

"Will I dare? For you?" He took her in his arms. Helen felt that his arms were strong as iron. She let herself go. She told herself that this was love.

They came to earth again when they heard some one else walking in the orchard, and they sprang apart, and in a moment or two went back to the dancing on the lawn, back to the music and the lights and other people and sanity.

They had missed three dances, and Sandy had to find his partners and apologize—difficult too. One girl was really angry, and he felt she had cause, but he could not mind about it. He was living for the waltz after next—he was to dance it with Helen. He saw Arthur dancing with her. "Lucky blighter!" No, no—Arthur was not lucky, he was the lucky one—Helen belonged to him, to him.

"We won't tell any one till I've told my parents, will we?" he whispered in her ear during the waltz.

"No," she said, "of course not. Not even mine."

"How understanding you are, Helen."

"Well, I'd be a prize imbecile if I didn't understand that," she said, "dear Sandy!"

They had to say good night in the midst of the crowd of departing guests. It was wonderful to them to think that they knew what they knew and nobody else knew it. They shook hands as others did, but Helen pressed his fingers in a little new way. They knew all right.

It was obviously impossible to speak to his father that night. Every one was in bed when he and Arthur reached home. They still shared a room during Arthur's vacations, and Arthur's side of the room was always littered with books, for he had reading to do in his holidays, and he did it. He had always worked hard. He had taken his B.A. at Durham just before he was twenty-one, because of which he was to be excused one year at his theological college. He was to be ordained when he was twenty-three.

The brothers crept up-stairs so as not to wake the family. Arthur turned up the lamp that stood on a table near his bed—it had been put there by their mother.

They discussed the party in whispers, but Sandy hardly knew what Arthur said, or even what he said himself, he was so very happy, and so very miserable. As they had come up-stairs he had heard his father snore—not loudly—just a thoroughly peaceful breathing—and the sound had struck at his heart.

Arthur was the first in bed. "Do you mind if I keep the light going a little while, old Sandy?" he asked. "There's a thing I want to look up. I can remember things better somehow if I go to sleep on them. Do you mind?"

"Not a bit," said Sandy. He got into bed and lay watching Arthur as he read, and long after Arthur had turned out the light he lay still staring into the darkness.

The moon had set and the night was very dark, very dark and still, like black velvet.

Sandy rose at six and went out to the cattle. He found Len Stocker there before him. It was market day at Biggleswade, and there were two yearling bulls to be sold, and five of the heifers. Sandy rather grudged the heifers, but the pastures were so dry. He had had to keep the two yearlings in the oniony meadows for over a week, and their breath and their bodies smelled horrible. He needed those onion meadows for the calves, he simply had to use those wretched meadows. If the rain did not come soon he knew he might have to sell more beasts. He was having to feed the milking cows on hay as it was, and the winter's fodder was quickly disappearing. Water was getting very scarce too—many people were having to cart it miles.

Bentley was lucky in owning a pump with a good water supply. Neighboring farmers had been sending to Bentley for water for the past six weeks. And still the sun shone, and still it shone, hot and clear. There was no sign of rain.

Len Stocker had theories about the probable price that Sandy would get for his bulls at Biggleswade. He was grooming them ready for their public appearance, and they were fine young beasts, but Len was not optimistic. He wanted Sandy to keep them until the rain came.

"You'll fetch a better price for 'em," he said. "Who's a-goin' to buy bulls with nothing to give 'em to eat?"

Sandy told Len again his reasons for wanting to be

rid of the bulls, he had told him at least twice before, and each was sticking to his point when Bob appeared in the doorway. Sandy felt something in him sink in a sickly way. How should he tell his father he meant to leave him and Bentley?

Bob was worried. "What d'yer think now, Sandy?" he asked. "Whatever's a-coming to us *I* dunno—the ole pump's gone dry, son."

"Oh, Dad, *no!*" Sandy exclaimed.

"It has then. You come and see."

Sandy hurried from the shed. He took the handle of the pump, but it flopped up and down with no resistance.

"Well, that's dry, ain't it?" asked Bob.

"As a bone," said Sandy. He looked at his father aghast. This was certainly not the moment to tell him about Helen.

He said, "Mr. Brandon told me last night that his pump was supplying half the village, and Lee's doing the other half. The pump on the Green went dry a week ago."

"So Lee was a-tellin' me. No, it were young Norman told me."

"Shall I go to Lee and see if he can let us have any? He might lend us his cart anyhow—I might get some from the Vicarage."

"Ah, you might. How did you go on last night?"

"Splendidly."

"Lot of people there?"

"Quite a few."

"Enjoy yourself?"

"Very much, thanks."

"Ah! I used to like a party myself when I was your age." Bob looked ruefully at his pump. He took up the useless handle again and let it drop. "I'm a good mind to say I wish I hadn't let any one have a drop," he said.

Sandy smiled. "Not you!" he said tenderly. He had never before felt his father so dear, and his dearness hurt.

Bob looked up with comic pathos at his tall son. "They won't half look down their noses when they come for their water and there ain't none, will they?"

It was about two hours before Sandy came back with Mr. Lee's water-cart and a load of water from the Vicarage. It took time to water the beasts, and then one of the men was sent for a second load. Len Stocker and two others had to get on the road with the bulls and the heifers. Then Bentley took breakfast, and Sandy and his father had to make rather a rush of it to Biggleswade. There was no quiet in which he could talk about Helen.

The market was slow, many willing to sell and few willing to buy. Sandy's bulls sold fairly well, but Len Stocker felt that his point had been proved. They ought to have fetched at least a third more than they did. The heifers would not sell at any price, and they had to be driven ignominiously home again.

Sandy and his father became separated in the market. Sandy was discussing with Mr. Larkins the seri-

ousness of the drought—it was the one topic of conversation—when he heard a shout in the road, and saw that there was confusion among some outgoing cattle. They seemed to have tied themselves up around a float. Mr. Larkins and he gave the plunging cattle one glance, and went on talking.

Presently a man touched Sandy's elbow, and he turned. The man was pale, and the muscles in his face were twitching.

"You're young Mr. Brocklebank, aren't you?" he said.

"Yes," said Sandy.

"You'd better come. There's been an accident."

Sandy's heart seemed to leap and then stop. He went white. "Not my father?" he asked.

"You'd better come," the man said again.

Sandy elbowed his way out of the auction yard, and Mr. Larkins followed him. There was a tightly packed crowd in the road. He heard vaguely one man and another tell the rest to "Give young Brocklebank room."

Bob was lying in the road bleeding horribly from his head and one of his ankles. Sandy knelt beside him, and Bob put his hand in his son's.

"Eh, Sandy," he said, and closed his eyes.

"Whatever was it, Dad?" Sandy asked.

"An ole 'orse," said Bob faintly. "I stepped outer the way of an ole cow, and got under—an ole 'orse."

Mr. Larkins bent to Sandy's ear. "Let's take him into the Swan," he said.

"Has any one gone for a doctor?" Sandy asked. "Some one go for a doctor."

"Let's get him into the Swan."

"All right. Only some one go for a doctor."

"I'll go, Sandy. I'll fetch a doctor from somewhere." It was Norman Lee who spoke.

"Let's get him into the Swan," said Mr. Larkins again. "Here, fetch a hurdle somebody."

"Don't move 'im, Mister," one man cried. "His leg's broke."

About a dozen hurdles were produced in about as many seconds, and very carefully some of the men lifted Bob and put him on to one of them. Larkins whipped off his jacket and put it for a pillow under Bob's bleeding head.

Sandy felt that he was dreaming. They carried Bob into the hotel and laid him on the sofa in a private room. His eyes closed. He seemed to have fainted. Sandy, still in a dream, watched the daughter of the house busy about his father. She put a mackintosh sheet under his head, and brought a bowl of water and a soft cloth. She was very gentle he thought, mopping up the blood.

"How long do doctors take to come?" Sandy asked idiotically, and then, suddenly, he woke up. Mr. Larkins, the joker, the puller of legs, was sitting behind his father weeping—weeping quite openly and obviously and unashamed.

Sandy jumped to his feet and went to the hotel door. A crowd stood around it.

"Is there any one who'll take our gig and go and fetch my mother and—and my brother Maurice?" he asked.

"I'll go, Sandy," said a voice. It was Norman Lee again. He said, "The Doctor's coming quick as he can. Where's the gig?"

"The Bull's Head."

"Right!" He turned to go.

"Half a minute, Norman. What will you tell her?"

"Well, what shall I tell her?"

"Say Dad's hurt his leg. Get Maurry, Norman."

"Right!"

In the sitting-room Bob opened his eyes. "Sandy!" he called. "Where's our Sandy?"

Mr. Larkins said, "He's coming, Brocklebank."

And Sandy came.

"Sandy!" Bob said.

Sandy knelt beside his father and took his hand. "I—believe I'm going," he said in a tone of faint astonishment.

Sandy did not speak. He couldn't.

"Oh," Bob said, "I ain't half glad there's you, son. I no need to tell you to look after your mother and them. You're a good lad, Sandy. You've always been a real good lad to us all."

Sandy was in agony, and Bob stroked his head. He said, "Is your mother coming?"

"Yes," said Sandy.

"You don't want to break your heart, son," he whispered. "You'll need to comfort your mother and

them—if I go, see?" And then, suddenly, with closed eyes and a smile on his lips he said, "O God, I do thank you as there's Sandy. You ain't been half good to me, Father in Heaven, givin' me a lad like him. I ain't never done nothing to deserve a lad like our Sandy, Father."

Mr. Larkins bolted from the room.

The Doctor came and looked at Bob, and left him. "I won't disturb him," he said.

"You mean——?" Sandy asked.

"I'm very sorry—yes."

Sandy sat down by his father, and Bob hardly spoke again. Once he said, "Nellie," and Sandy whispered, "She's coming, Dad. She's coming very quickly."

She came, just before the end, and Maurice with her.

Bob smiled at her.

"Oh, my darling!" she said. "Oh, Bob!"

He said, "Nellie, our Sandy will——"

"Yes?"

Bob seemed to float away for several minutes, then he opened his eyes and tried again. "Missis!"

"Yes, Bob, darling."

"Our Sandy will—care—you."

And then he died.

They left him at the Swan for the inquest, and Sandy and Maurice took their mother back to Bentley in the gig. It was dreadful—too dreadful to write of. Sandy was thankful that he had sent for Maurice. Wonderful sterling boy, Maurice. He seemed some-

how to know what to do and what to say. He sat with his arm round Nellie all the way back to Bentley. It seemed to help her.

There was no water for the cattle and horses. It all had to be seen to—Lee's water-cart had to be borrowed again. Even the onion meadows seemed to have scorched in that day's sun. Two of the cows were ill. Len Stocker said that he would sit up with them. Len was dropping tears about the place almost enough to water one cow, Sandy thought. Sandy could not weep.

CHAPTER XVII

THE night that Bob died, Arthur, his brown eyes smoldering with anger, tackled Sandy on this wise. "Why didn't you send for *me* when Father was hurt?"

Sandy, into whose head the thought of sending for Arthur had never come, was nonplussed.

"I—I'm sorry——" he began.

"I should hope you are!" Arthur exploded. "I'm older than Maurice. What did you send for *him* for? I thought it was something to do with the farm business."

"I said Dad had——"

"Yes, had hurt his leg. I thought he wanted Mother—sort of. He always did if his little finger ached. And I thought you wanted Maurice about the farm business. I never dreamed you'd send for him and not for me if Father were—dying." He flung himself like an angry child on to his bed and wept. "And I never saw him, I never saw him! He might have said something to me, and I never saw him. Oh, I know you've always hated me, Sandy, but I never thought you'd——"

Sandy sighed deeply. It was almost a groan. "I've not hated you, Arthur. I'm very sorry. I simply never thought of sending for you. I suppose it's being used to having Maurice at home. I'm sorry."

"That's right," said Arthur, "throw it up to me that

I've left home. I suppose I've no right in the family because I want to take Holy Orders. It doesn't make him any less my father anyhow, whatever you think."

"Not a bit," said Sandy patiently. It was the patience of exhausted emotion.

"I know you've always resented my going to college. Well, I expect Bentley and everything will be yours now. You can stop the money for my fees if you like. Are you going to?"

Sandy did not answer for a moment, then he spoke very deliberately. "I think that when you know what Dad intended to do you're a dirty swine to ask me."

"Oh!" Arthur exclaimed. "Well, considering how you've treated me to-day I don't see how you could expect me to know what's going on in your mind. But as you take it like that, thank you. I'm obliged to you. I tell you I thought——"

"You'd infinitely oblige me," said Sandy wearily, "if you'd not tell me what you thought, if you'd just shut up. I want to be quiet."

"Oh, all right," said Arthur. He gathered himself up and undressed, put the lamp in a convenient position for reading, and got into bed with a book. Sandy too undressed and got into bed. He lay for a while with closed eyes, the yellow glow of the lamp penetrating his eyelids. Then, when Arthur turned out the light he stared into the darkness. It was a night just exactly like the one before—very dark and still, like black velvet.

At five he rose and went out. Maurice was out be-

fore him, and just going through the yard. He saw Sandy and came back to speak to him. He could not, somehow, shout.

"I thought I'd go and see if we could get Lee's cart before the others start wanting it," he said.

"Good for you, Maurry. Have you seen Mother by any chance? I didn't like to disturb her."

"No, but I believe she's asleep. Bessie got up and went to her in the night. I believe she slept with her—at least they may be asleep now. I didn't hear them getting up or anything."

"I hope they'll just stop there, if they are asleep."

"Yes. Sandy, I was thinking—in the night, that——"

"What?"

"Well, you must feel you're carrying an awful lot. I only mean—I'll do my level best to pull fair with you about things, Sandy. I'll pull my weight."

"I know you will," Sandy said. "You always do pull your weight, Maurry, and more than your weight."

Maurice suddenly leaned against the wall and burst into sobs. "Oh, Dad!" he said.

Sandy put an arm round him. "Hush, Maurry," he said. "We mustn't—you and I."

Maurice pulled himself together. "All right, Sandy," he said. "I'll—I'll pull fair. I'll go to Lee's."

Sandy went into the barn to see Len Stocker and the sick cows. He found himself whispering as he went, "God bless that dear kid. God bless that dear kid."

Maurice was eighteen.

The verdict at the inquest was "accidental death." The driver of the horse that had killed Bob Brocklebank was not to blame. Bob had done just what he had said, "Stepped outer the way of an ole cow, and got under an ole 'orse."

Ellen came from West Kirby terribly upset. Indeed she was so much upset that Lucy had come with her in the train to Biggleswade. She would come no farther, because she would not intrude on the family's grief. She put Ellen into a taxi in Biggleswade and went home to Liverpool on the next train, traveling through the night. And Ellen felt completely desolate and helpless in that taxi. There would be no one at Bentley specially to pet and take care of her; she would have to do her part to help the others, and she simply did not feel capable of it without Lucy. Her friend had surrounded her with tenderness since the news came, and now, when she had to face the dreadfulness of that home-going, Lucy was not there. She turned her face into the cushion that Lucy had put behind her head, and wet it with many tears. "Oh, Dad," she whispered. "I did love you. You never knew how much I loved you. I can't—I simply can't——"

But she did. She took over immediately into her very capable hands the arrangements of many things including the mourning dresses and the funeral tea. Bessie was hard put to it to get the work done at all, for a mysterious malady had overtaken their mother. She said it was "the shock flown to her legs." She could hardly walk about the house.

Sandy made her see the Doctor, and he told him that probably his mother had diagnosed her own case perfectly correctly. But she insisted on going to the funeral; no argument would move her, and so, leaning hard on Sandy's arm, she followed the coffin into church—a church already full. Bob would have been astonished if he could have seen how much he was beloved. Even Sandy, who had been his right hand, found that he had known very little of what the other hand was doing. Stories had come floating to Bentley since his death of this man and that whom he had helped, of poor women he had befriended, of young wild things whom he had saved from disgrace. The church was packed to the doors with Bob's special friends.

It was dreadfully moving. Over the grave Mr. Brandon spoke of "our dear and valued churchwarden," and then he broke down and became simply human; he said, "He was just about the best friend I ever had." The emotional effect on the congregation was overwhelming, and Mr. Brandon, for a moment, was swept away with the rest. Only Sandy stood rigid, his arm about his mother, his face perfectly white.

The funeral tea, under Ellen's pilotage, was perfectly managed. Mr. Brandon was there, but not Helen. Sandy saw her later in the club barn.

But before that the will was read, the whole family so far down as Bessie, sitting stiff with discomfort in the parlor. It was a simple will. An investment had been made for Nellie that would bring her in about a

hundred a year, everything else was left "to my eldest son, Sanderson, because I know that he will deal with my affairs and with his brothers and sisters exactly as I should do myself."

So it was the master of Bentley who met Helen in the club barn. It was the first time they had spoken to each other since the night of the party.

Helen turned from sorting bandages on the table and held out both hands to him. "Sandy—dear!" she said.

He took both her hands and kissed her, and sat down, feeling suddenly weak under the touch of sympathy. For the first time he felt the dryness in him breaking with an upward surge of tears. A habit of self-control held them back.

Helen spoke after a moment. "Sandy, did you tell him—about us—before—before——?"

"No."

"Oh!"

"There wasn't a chance to get it in. I was going to after—after market."

"And then——?"

"Yes."

"What are you going to do now, Sandy?"

"Oh, Helen, I can't leave them just now, not just yet—possibly. Can I?"

Helen was silent for a moment, and in that moment a cold breath seemed to come between them. Sandy, in that moment knew that he had lost Helen, and Helen knew that Bentley had claimed Sandy.

Neither of them faced facts. Helen said, "No, I do realize you'll have to let your mother and all of them—get a bit used to it first—I mean——"

"Yes. Helen, look—I can't possibly go till Maurice is old enough to farm Bentley, can I?"

"Till Maurice is old enough? When will you count him old enough?"

"Soon—few years."

"A few years!" she said in a tiny voice.

"Oh, Helen!"

"I was afraid you'd consider Bentley first."

"Oh, Helen, don't you see, my dear, I can't help it? It always *has* been Bentley—for me—always. And now there's Mother and the girls, and Arthur and Ellen depending on me for their fees, and Vickie not much more than a baby, and George—as he is——"

"Oh, yes," Helen said. "I'm not saying it's not true, Sandy. It is true—that's just it."

"And, Helen, when Dad was hurt, you know—he—his last words almost were—were—it was a sort of prayer." Sandy struggled not to break down. He wanted to cover his face and sob. Only his longing to make Helen understand forced him to speak. "He—he knew he was dying, and he—he told me he knew he had no need to *ask* me to look after the others."

He stopped, forcing his self-control, and Helen did not speak. In a moment he added, "Helen—he—he—thanked God he'd got me—to leave."

His voice went to rags, and the deep lines in his cheeks grew deeper. His fingers, strong and hard, worked in and out of Helen's.

She drew her hands away from his, not urgently. They clasped themselves tight in her own lap. She said, "It's all very well. It's all very well for him to die thanking God he owned another human being. It's all very well, but you belong to yourself and to me. Where do I come in? Where do you come in?"

"Helen!" Sandy exclaimed. He had never been so completely astounded in his life.

"Oh, yes," said Helen. "I've no doubt it sounds very bad of me. But the selfishness of it, Sandy! The utter selfishness of parents! What about you!"

"Oh, Helen, look here! He didn't know I wanted to go. He never dreamed I wanted anything but——"

"Anything but to be indispensable to him and Bentley. No, he never dreamed of it. He ought to have dreamed of it—years ago. You ought to have told him. But probably if you had told him he'd have thought it nothing but a silly whim when there was glorious Bentley to be farmed. Arthur and Ellen had struggle enough to get off. You were always so good, Sandy. You always went to the wall for other people. You'll do it again, you'll always do it. Maurry will want to go off some time and you'll let him go. You'll never leave Bentley. Your father and your family will stretch their hands over you always. You'll never get free."

"I can when Maurry's old enough," said Sandy obstinately.

Helen shook her head.

"Look here, I can build a house for us wherever you like."

"On Bentley. No thank you, Sandy."

"Oh, Helen, I'd—I'd—tell them——"

Helen smiled on him sadly. She said, "I wish you could understand that it's myself I can't trust about it. I know, I *know* I couldn't stand it. I should be miserable, and I should make you miserable too. Bentley takes you from me, Sandy."

Both of them gazed dumbly before them. Presently he said, "*Can't* you wait till Maurry's old enough—just till I see them through this, and he knows the whole business?"

She said, "I would, I would indeed, but something tells me there'll always be something, some vital reason why Bentley must keep you. You'll always sacrifice yourself, because it's the way you're made. Maurice will want to go to Canada or something, and you'll let him go. You would now if he wanted to, wouldn't you?"

"But he doesn't," Sandy protested lamely.

"Ah, but you would. It's no good. I see it, Sandy, I *see* it. There'll always be some crisis. You're giving way in this one, you will in the next. I was a fool not to see it always. I was a fool to let myself think you would ever leave Bentley."

"I meant to, and I mean to."

"Oh, yes, yes, I know."

"Oh, Helen, Helen—look——"

"Don't plead, Sandy. If you do I may give way and say I'll wait or something—and that would mean more scenes like this, and if you can bear it, I can't. Let's—

let's never speak of it again. I shall—go back to France, I think—or something."

Sandy rose. He said, "I must see that the cows are all watered. Good night."

"Good night," she said.

At the barn door Sandy turned and looked at Helen. Her head was on her arm on the table. He was back at her side in a moment.

"Helen," he said, "we're not going to give each other up like this. It's mad."

"Oh," she cried, "I thought—I thought I could make you leave Bentley, and I can't, I can't."

"I'll leave Bentley when I can, dear. Come, you do care for me. You're minding dreadfully, poor child. Come, say you'll marry me. We belong to each other."

She looked up. "No, we don't," she said. "I wish, oh, I wish we did. But you belong to Bentley, Sandy, and I belong—nowhere. I can't marry you, Sandy. I won't marry you. There!"

Her head went back to the table, and Sandy strode out of the barn.

There was a scene that night with Ellen, one of a very different kind. She followed Sandy out-of-doors after supper, and spoke to him leaning up against a barn-door.

"Sandy!"

"Well?"

He had hoped to be alone, and he was not pleased to see Ellen.

"I—I've been thinking," she said, "whether——"

She hesitated, and then the words came out quickly almost on top of one another. "I wonder whether I'm needed at home now Mother's poorly—and everything. I wonder whether I ought to come home, and if you like I'll give up teaching, and come."

Sandy looked at his sister quickly, and then looked away because her face was quivering so that he did not like to see it. He was astonished. In his mind he had always coupled Arthur and Ellen together. It gave his nerves a shock to find her capable of such complete self-immolation. It was a moment before he could believe that she was sincere, but she was, perfectly, and she stood waiting for his answer.

He said, "I don't think you need."

She said, "Don't you? Really?"

"No," he said. "If there's help needed in the house I'll get a servant. I don't see why you should give up all you want in life."

He saw the tears rush to her eyes. They showed something of what the offer had meant. He left her standing there. He had never been able to be tender with Ellen, and he was in no mood for tenderness. He felt utterly alone in the universe. She had gone up in his estimation to a place she never lost, but that was all. As he crossed the yard he muttered, "No one need but me. No one need but me."

CHAPTER XVIII

NELLIE continued delicate after Bob's death. The shock that had "flown to her legs" did not seem inclined to fly away again. To use again Nellie's own expression, it "settled" there. She superintended the housework and seemed always to be busy, but she could not "put the work through her fingers" as she had done, and Bessie was hard driven, particularly as she slept with her mother.

Poor Nellie, if anything went wrong during the day, or if any decision had to be made, would spend her nights in long hopeless fits of weeping because she could not tell Bob about it. Sometimes she would hug Bessie to her, and sometimes she would thrust her away, ready almost to scream if the girl touched her.

She would not hear of having a servant; she said she wanted her home private and didn't want a stranger about the house, particularly just now. She wouldn't have minded if Violet could have come back, but she would not have a stranger. What did they want a girl for? She and Bessie always had managed, ever since Bessie left school, and if she couldn't put all the work through her fingers that she used to do, well, so long as they hadn't a stranger in the house they could always just do it another day when they could bring it in. Times were hard enough, with this awful dry weather, without spending money silly like that.

Times certainly were hard, the harvest was scanty, the grain parched in the ear, the straw short. The cows were dry and fodder scarce, water almost scarcer, and still the sun shone out of a brassy sky, still no rain came. It was about this time that old George Bates finally gave up work, and Bert Jinn (Bessie's possession) was employed on Bentley.

Sandy worked hard on the farm. He gave plenty of work, but very little responsibility, to Maurice; he gave none to any one else, and he became taciturn. There never seemed to be much worth saying, and except when he had to give orders about the farm, he rarely spoke. He discussed farm matters sometimes with Maurice, remembering how his father used to discuss them with him, and he took the boy with him to market whenever it was possible.

Opinion in the auction yard was that young Brocklebank had taken his father's death too hard, and that it had not improved him. Maurice was much the more popular brother of the two at that period. Mr. Larkins tried to tease him into liveliness, struggled to draw him out of himself by a constant pulling of the leg. But Sandy could not be drawn. He was polite, he even laughed when laughter seemed to be required of him, but his eyes did not light up.

He became wonderfully unobservant. He ate and slept and farmed Bentley, he did not see that bonnie Bessie was wilting before his eyes. Once at dinnertime it struck him that she was not so clean and tidy as she used to be, and he asked her why she did not

brush her hair before she came to table. And Bessie, instead of giving him the gentle answer that once she would have done, became angry and then wept. Sandy flung himself out-of-doors—a miserable household to work for, he thought.

Maurice, although working very hard with the blue and white cattle, generally managed to help Bessie a little; he always brought in the coal and sticks; he lighted the fire every morning before he went out, and took his mother and sister a cup of tea. Often at night when Bessie had been so busy that the whole day's crockery had had to be left in a pile in the dairy, Maurice helped with the stupendous washing-up. One day he dared to tackle his mother on the subject of hired help. She was adamant.

"Bessie's very tired, Mother," he said.

"She's no need to be. I've told her I dunno how many times to leave what she can't do."

"Yes," said Maurice, his body tingling uncomfortably, for the subject was very sore, "but she says she always does leave more than she ought to keep the place right, and if she leaves it to-day it makes more for to-morrow, and it all mounts up."

Nellie was angry. "I don't want you and Bessie to teach me about my own house. I managed it many years before either of you was born or thought of."

Maurice ventured further, greatly daring. "I know you did. But you did have Grandma and Violet to help, didn't you? And—and I expect you were a better manager than Bessie," he added diplomatically.

"Bessie can manage very well me telling her what to do," said Nellie. "And I work very hard myself, Maurice. Bessie needn't think she does it all. It's very unkind of Bessie to make out she's put on, and me working till I'm ready to drop with me legs like they are and have been ever since your Dad died. And now my own children put on me," she quavered.

Maurice was stabbed in his heart, but he stuck to it. "You shouldn't be working so hard, Mother, and you needn't if you'd only have a girl in. I know Sandy would pay for one fast enough, and I believe there's Bertha Jarman would come in by the day."

"Perhaps she would. I won't have her. You know what tongues the Jarmans have got. You should know yourself better, Maurice, than to ask me to have a Jarman. I won't have a stranger about the place, so you and Bessie might as well know it. I *can't* have a stranger about, without your Dad here or *anything!* Oh, if only your Dad was here!"

Maurice put his arms round her. "Oh, if only he was!" he sighed. "Don't cry, Mum. It might hurt him—if he knew." Maurice was blinking back his own tears, and Nellie saw them. She stroked his head. "Eh," she said, "I haven't half got some dear children, I have! I oughter to be thankful. Eh, Maurry, I *can't* let a stranger come in."

So Maurice doubled his efforts to help Bessie, and Bessie and their mother continued overtired and overwrought, and Sandy, wrapped up in his own work and his own unhappiness, knew nothing about it. Often it

was in Maurice's mind to point it out, but he did not do it. Poor old Sandy seemed to be carrying such a load already. And besides he did not see what Sandy could do. If he said anything it would simply mean another scene with his mother such as he had had. He just went on doing all he could, but it did not seem to relieve Bessie much, and he was often very tired himself. He hoped some day something might happen to alter things.

Something did. It happened through the last person on earth whom any one would have expected to precipitate a crisis—Bert Jinn.

One night at supper-time no supper appeared, and Bessie was nowhere to be found. Sandy went out to do his last round among the cattle, and Bert Jinn (supposed long since to have gone home) met him near one of the sheds. Bert's pale blue eyes were blazing. He opened fire on Sandy without preliminary.

"I won't stand it, Master, I won't stick it any longer, and that's a fact, that is."

"Why, what's the matter, Bert?" Sandy asked, amazed.

"Everything's the matter," Bert informed him. "Keeping your sister slaving for you, paying her nothing, and her working her fingers to the bone for you, and you never so much as looking at your plate to see what she's been slaving cooking for yer. Eat it, and up from the table and off. Never so much as, 'Thank yer, Bessie.'" Bert began to choke, but the river of his words was in spate and overcame the emotional

obstacle. "You and your mother! Maurice, he does do what he can, but you keep her nothing but a slave, you do, Master. And I'm a-tellin' yer, I ain't a-goin' to stand it. She come out after tea to speak to me, and started crying just because she were so tired. Any of the others can have anything—fine Mr. Arthur with his college and his degrees and his parsons, and fine Miss Ellen with her doctors and her teachers and her schools. *They* don't work for yer, they don't do anything oney spend yer money, so nothing's too good forrem. And Bessie, when she'd cried her heart out, she went to sleep, and *I* ain't a-goin' to wake her to get your suppers, nor you ain't neither, so I tell yer!"

Sandy said, "Look here, Bert——" but the river went on.

"And if you won't treat her right I'm a-goin' off with her, so that's tellin' yer fair and straight forward. I'll marry her don't matter what you say, if she *is* oney in her seventeen. I wanted to get on and raise myself a bit first, but she'd have a lot better time the wife of a working lad nor as *your* sister. It ain't as if she wasn't the best girl ever trod on this earth, and willing, and——"

The emotional obstacle overcame the flood then. He stopped, choking with wrath and other things.

Sandy spoke very quietly. He said, "Why didn't I know of this before? Why didn't somebody tell me she was overdone? She ought to have told me. We'll get a servant, of course."

Bert said, "The Missis won't have a girl."

Sandy did not answer that. He said, "Of course she shall be paid too. I didn't realize she wasn't. Why didn't Bessie tell me all this herself?"

Bert was taken aback by Sandy's mildness, but he felt it right to batter up his temper a little longer. He said, "Does me how you haven't seen it. Every one else has. She didn't ought to have to *tell* you to treat her right. She'd be ashamed to. Rather kill herself for any one, Bessie would."

Sandy and Maurice got the supper, after a fashion, and Bessie was brought in to eat her share of it. She was astonished to see the supper table set, and not a little frightened by the charged state of the atmosphere. During the meal Sandy spoke to her across the table.

He said, "I'm going to tot up the school fees Ellen has had up till now, and I'm going to put the same amount in the bank for you, Bessie."

Bessie was astonished, she flushed and then went pale. "Oh, Sandy, you don't need to do anything like that," she said. "Times bad an' all."

"Don't talk so silly, Sandy," said their mother. "Bessie don't want for nothing. Ellen's been one expense enough surely without making Bessie another."

"And," said Sandy, "I shall give you every term the same that Ellen takes back with her. You can do what you like with it."

"Well, I never!" Nellie wailed. "If oney your Dad was here!"

"I wish to God he was!" Sandy exclaimed. "But he's

not, so I'm doing my best, Mother. He left me to do my best, and I'll do it. We must have a servant."

"Oh, Sandy! Oh, *don't* get a servant because of me," Bessie besought him. "I was oney tired to-night. I'll manage all right. Mother doesn't want one."

"Just shut up, Bessie," said Sandy. Supper was ended. He got up from the table and began to clear away. Maurice and Bessie washed up, almost silently, but when he had gone back to the kitchen and Bessie was spreading the cloths to dry she indulged in her second weeping fit that evening.

As she helped her mother into bed that night she spoke piteously. "Mum, *I* didn't want it. *I* didn't do it—really."

"No," said her mother. "Well, I suppose Sandy's master here now. It's hard when your children stand up and rule you. I suppose I'm nothing but an old woman now, and nobody in my own house."

All the same Nellie slept fairly well that night, better than did Bessie, whose mind rushed her about through many emotions.

The next day Bertha Jarman came to Bentley, and peace, of a sort, came too. Nellie looked upon her eldest son with new eyes. He had surprised her into a new sort of respect—and into a curious unconscious relief. She ceased to weep all night if anything had to be decided. Her legs grew a little stronger.

The rain came in December—deluges of it, and the ground became squelchy mud. One waded in viscous clay about the boot-tops at the field gates where the

cattle stood; and nearly all through the next year it rained. Yet the harvest of 1912 was plentiful. In many parts of England farmers lost heavily through being unable to get their corn in. It stood in the ceaseless rain until it grew green in the shocks. Bedfordshire did very well, because its rainfall is always light, and Bentley's milk was excellent throughout the whole year.

Helen Brandon was traveling in France with a weakling boy and his mother. It was a pleasant job, and sufficiently remunerative. There was a talk at one time that she was engaged to a French army officer, but nothing, apparently, came of the affair. The club had dwindled out. Helen had left two of her Biggleswade friends to carry it on, but Shepton was a long way off, and they had been busy and so on (possibly their reasons were mainly so on), and the girls had met to find no leader on so many occasions that they had ceased to come. The barn returned to its original uses; only the whitewash lasted to remind any who might remember that once there was a club.

Little by little Sandy grew more human. He had more conversation. By the beginning of 1914 he was almost as one would have expected the boy Sandy to grow up. He was still chary about letting any one else have responsibility on the farm, though he did let Maurice have a little, and once, when influenza attacked Bentley, and Sandy fell ill, the younger brother proved his mettle. He managed the farm for a whole week, and looked after the stricken household

with a tenderness that touched Sandy; indeed he was touched quite painfully when, after all the others were getting well, Maurice himself fell ill, and was a great deal worse than any of them had been. When some people are ill we can be very sorry, and let them bear their own pains, but when others are ill we carry their pains in our own bodies as we see them suffer. Sandy knew that he would rather have influenza six times himself than let Maurice have it at all. He would actually suffer less. Strange how we are made—and Maurice was such a queer fellow. One spring evening when the influenza was over and almost forgotten, young Norman Lee, coming to the farm, summed Maurice up.

He leaned against Bentley's garden wall, chewing his cigarette, and watched Maurice working among his flowers.

"Never see such a chap as you are in all my life, Maurry," he said. "Never did see such a chap. You don't smoke nor drink nor court nor go nowhere."

Maurice looked up and grinned with perfect happiness. He had no explanation to offer.

Arthur was to be ordained at Trinity. Ellen, most successfully and with much originality, was teaching the blind. Bessie was to be married in August, Bert Jinn having inherited a cottage and garden and a little more from a deceased aunt who had been his godmother. Vickie was still at school. The promises of her babyhood had not been belied; she was a ringleader and a tomboy. She was tall for her age, thin and

lithe and full of energy. Her curling fair hair was never tidy. You caught her at a lucky moment if you saw her face and hands clean.

George was just poor little George. He was nine years old, a helpless imbecile lump of humanity. Since the age of seven he had begun to have epileptic fits. He was a sad and piteous sight. He knew his mother and Bessie, but it was doubtful whether he knew any one else.

Whatever they were going to do when Bessie left home was a problem no one liked to face. It was one Bessie herself could not think of without almost determining not to get married at all. But no one would hear of her refusing marriage for home's sake. Marriage is the one reason that everybody may leave home for—in the eyes of the world. "Unless one happens to be me," Sandy thought.

But the time had come when Maurice could be left in charge of Bentley, and Helen Brandon was not married. She was still abroad, but due back about the middle of August or the beginning of September. Sandy made his plans.

One afternoon before harvest began he and Maurice went to look at Bentley's most forward field of oats. Maurice advised that the cutting should begin the next day, but Sandy regarded the clouds. There was something certainly to regard. The weather had been fine and hot for a fortnight, and still was fine and hot, but some black ragged clouds were blowing up with great speed from the southwest. Thunder was coming.

"Look," Sandy said, "those clouds—the color of them! My goodness, there'll be no cutting to-morrow! Maurry, we're in for a deluge."

Maurice turned and watched the scudding clouds climbing up toward the sun. "By jove," he said, "by jinking jove, every bit of corn will be laid about an hour from now!"

"'Fraid it will," said Sandy. "I say!" (For a moment the farmer in him was lost in the more primitive man.) "I say, that's a sight to see, isn't it?"

The storm gathered as they watched the sky. Sandy had made up his mind to tell Maurice that afternoon about his plans. He had taken him to the oat-field by the Low Meadows to talk to him, and he felt as nervous as ever he had done in his life. He might have been a boy going to speak to Mr. Kettering.

"Maurry," he said, "if I ever went away, could you farm Bentley?"

Maurice stared at him with wide eyes. He said, "You? Went away?"

"Yes," Sandy said. He looked over the tall standing oats, twenty acres of them, looking very golden against the purple sky, rustling and whispering in the gathering breeze. His brother's face had gone white, and he hated to see it. He had known he would have to give him a shock, but he had hoped it would not be so bad as this.

He said, "Bentley was here before I was, old chap. It would stop here if I went, you know."

"Sandy, you're pulling my leg. You don't mean it."

"I do," Sandy said.

"Why?" Maurice asked. "Why?"

"I—want to get married."

"Married?" Maurice echoed, and there was anguish in his voice. "Who to?"

"Helen Brandon."

"Helen Brandon! Sandy, but she's been abroad for years! You haven't seen her for years. How? When? I don't understand how you could——"

"It was before she went away, Maurry."

"That was before Dad died."

"She went away very soon after Dad died. I asked her to marry me at her twenty-first birthday party."

"Sandy! Did she say she would?"

"Sort of."

"But why didn't she then? Why did she go away? And why should you leave Bentley because you want to get married? Dad didn't leave Bentley, Grandpa didn't leave Bentley."

"It's better, old chap. There wasn't a whole houseful of people when they got married, you know."

"You could build another house."

"It would be far better for me to clear out."

Maurice rested his chin on his hand on the gate. He was thinking harder, possibly, than he had ever thought in his life before. Why would not Sandy bring Helen to Bentley? Why did he think it would be better for him to clear out? Was he ashamed of his home? Sandy? Never! It must be Helen's doing. And Sandy loved her enough to make him want to

leave them all—because Helen would not come to Bentley. Why had not Sandy gone before, then, when she had said "yes—sort of"? It was so long ago since her party. Why, it was the day before their father's death.

Ah, he had got it! That was the reason. Sandy would not leave them because their father had died, and he could not get married because Helen would not come to Bentley. Had she told Sandy she would wait?

Maurice said, "Sandy, are you sure?"

"Of what?"

"That Helen means to marry you."

"No, I'm not sure."

"But she promised you on the night of her party."

"Well, you see, er——"

Maurice suddenly caught his brother's arm and looked him straight in the eyes. It was a steady penetrating stare, and he saw what he looked for, for Sandy looked away. It was some time before he spoke. His heart was so full of much that he could not say. When he did speak he only said, "I'll do my very best, old Sandy."

"Am I asking too much, Maurry?"

"Asking too much?" he repeated. "Of me? After all you've—— No," he said. "It's only—what the place will be like—when you go—I mean—without you——"

A great growl of thunder shook the air about them, and one or two huge rain-drops were flung like missiles in their faces.

"Great Scot, it's on us—now!" Sandy exclaimed. "Quick!"

They ran for shelter, but the deluge descended on them, and soaked them to the skin before they reached the cowsheds. The corn was all laid flat in the fields in a few moments. A calf was struck by lightning and killed in the Low Meadows. Larkins lost a bullock, and Lee a mare, and two sheep killed by a falling elm. The storm delayed the harvest for days.

CHAPTER XIX

DISQUIETING rumors on the Continent hastened Helen Brandon's return to Shepton. She arrived on August first.

Of course there would not be war, nothing so dreadful could happen nowadays as a European war. We were much too enlightened. Something would be done to prevent anything so unthinkable. England and Germany would never do it—not in these days—and England and America would see to it that Germany and France did not plunge Europe in hell. As a dear old lady in *Punch* put it, "The Great Powers would intervene."

There would not be war, of course, but there might conceivably be some inconvenience to foreign subjects on the Continent, and so Helen, having a rooted objection to inconvenience, returned to England

Harvest was then in progress, a slow and difficult harvest, although an early one. The crops were flat, and machines were no use at all in most fields. Men had to sweat with scythes like their fathers in the broiling sun.

All hands were out to get the harvest in, and Sandy and Maurice swung and sweated with their men in the fields, where good mother earth makes all men brothers. Ellen was at home, but not Arthur. He was spending part of his vacation with a friend on the Nor-

folk Broads. Nothing could have seemed more peaceful than that August air.

But there were unquiet moments, as when rumor reached the harvest-fields that there were unwonted activities at Biggleswade barracks. All the officers and men had been recalled from their leaves or furloughs or whatever they were called—we knew little army nomenclature in those days. The newspapers were full of the Continental trouble, and our Navy had not been sent home (or something) from some big display. Of course Lord Roberts had been talking about this for a long while, but every one had thought the dear old man had a bee in his bonnet. Helen Brandon had come home. Things must be getting exciting in France. Exciting—that was just the word.

On Sunday evening, August third, Sandy went to church; afterward joined the Vicarage party and walked home with them. Maurice saw Sandy go, and he did not wait that night to chat around the village pump with the other farmer boys. He went straight home to Bentley—with his chin drooping on his chest.

Sandy was invited into the Vicarage, and stayed to supper—cold beef and beet-root, blanc-mange and stewed apples, biscuits and cheese. He hardly got a moment to speak to Helen alone. Helen managed that it should be so. She had gone to France in the first place to get over her affair with Sandy, and with admirable determination she had done what she went to do. Then she had stayed on because it suited her. She had also left England for Sandy to get over it, and it

annoyed her not a little to find the second project miscarried. And yet she was flattered. It certainly was a triumph that a man (a great, fine, six-foot-high man like Sandy) should keep so true to her. But she wished he would not look at her in just the same way, with exactly the same expression in his blue black eyes, as he had done before she went away. She had forgotten that his eyes looked just like that.

Oh, she did hope that he was not going to rake up the past, to try again to make her marry him. Bother him! She did not want to have her emotions so painfully stirred again.

After supper Mr. Brandon went to his study, and Mrs. Brandon went for a moment to see about some household matter, and they found themselves alone.

Sandy seized his chance. "Helen," he said, "Maurice is old enough to farm Bentley now. I've told him—about us—and he'll do it."

Helen flashed on him. "You've no right to tell him 'about us.' There isn't anything 'about us.' I *told* you —in the barn——"

"But, Helen!" Sandy exclaimed.

"No, Sandy, don't—*please.*"

"Helen, you don't want—you don't care now, then?"

"Not like that. I hate to hurt you. But you must see——"

Mrs. Brandon came into the room, and Sandy rose and said good night to them and went home. Late that evening Maurice, in his pajamas, slipped into Sandy's room.

"Say, Sandy," he said, "that blue heifer's got a fine calf to-night."

"Good," said Sandy from his bed.

"Bull."

"Good."

"I was just home in time. Bert Jinn was with her. He's an awfully decent boy."

"Yes."

Maurice sat on his brother's bed and waited.

Sandy said, "I'm not leaving Bentley."

Maurice flushed red. He was struggling between sympathy for his brother and his own delight. He said nothing for a while, then at last he spoke. "I—I expect I'm an awful swine, old chap, to be so jolly thankful."

Sandy answered, "You're a wondrous sterling fellow, Maurry."

Maurice went to bed to sleep the sleep of the weary and relieved. Sandy lay awake, but toward dawn a curious numbing contentment took possession of him. He thought, "No girl on earth is worth leaving Maurry for. Girls haven't it in them to care as he cares. By jove, a man's love is worth something!" And so he fell asleep.

Austria had declared war on Servia. Would England be drawn in? That was the question that haunted every moment of every one's day. Ellen took the *Daily Mail,* which came at about eleven o'clock, into the harvest-field, and the question was discussed there at dinner-time, as the men lay under an elm and ate.

In that peaceful harvest-field they could not believe that there would be war. "The Powers will go to any lengths to prevent it," Sandy said.

"But if Germany invades Belgium we'll have to," Ellen said.

"Germany won't. She can't. It's in the treaty, and she signed as much as we did."

"But, Sandy—what if—what if—she *did?*"

"My dear girl," Maurice told her, "the treaty was made just to prevent anything like that happening."

An elderly man, lying on his back, joined in the conversation. "There'll be war," he said. "Sure as we're a-lyin' 'ere, there'll be war. I've follered this up years. Bob is right. He's been at it ev's'long, and no one would listen. There's ain't nothing stopped the ole Germans coming this ev's'long, oney ole Albert Edderd, and he's been dead four year an' more. I tell yer they've got to have a go at some one with their grand, new, big ole army. Same as a little lad with a nice new knife in his pocket. You shut him up in the parlor with it, and tell him he ain't got to cut the furniture nor do nothing at all with his nice new knife—and see what'll happen."

Sandy exclaimed, looking at his paper, "Good gad! They're stopping payment at the banks!" He bit his pipe-stem, thereby damming a rush of tumultuous emotions. Then he spoke very quietly. "Come along. Let's get on with our job."

And they bent again to the gathering of the harvest.

Mr. Larkins, being up in London later in the day,

saw a tremendous announcement appear above the offices of a great newspaper. "British note to Germany. Ultimatum expires at midnight. One foot on Belgian soil."

War!

He stood petrified and stared. Suddenly he was conscious that some man whom he had never seen in his life before was gripping his hand. He returned the grip, before he looked at the man's face. It was an elderly face, thin, with a gray beard, and it was twitching. He shook the hand and held it.

"It's war!" he found himself exclaiming.

The man nodded. "Yes," he said, "war!"

And then spontaneously a roar burst from the crowded street, a great roar of cheering, Larkins was cheering and the man with the gray beard, every one was cheering—roar, roar, roar—it was terrific.

And then a voice started *God Save the King.* That anthem meant something then—it meant everything—England, honor, home. "Oh, God, save the King, indeed!"

"Send him victorious!"

The impossible had happened. The thing that could not be, was. But England was not breaking her word, England was England still!

Larkins fled. He wanted to rush back to Shepton and tell them. He felt that there was not a second to lose. He broke away from the crowd and ran till his breath was spent and his eyes were staring. War! One must do something about it quickly. One must not get

out of breath, breath would be needed. But one must act immediately.

Oh, it was frightful—war! Thank God England keeps her word. Thank God for being an Englishman—oh, but not war—surely not war! However would his wife take it about the boys? They would be sure to volunteer. Our little army could never face the German army, without volunteers. Tommy and Jimmie would go, of course they'd go—such fine boys—Larkins stumbled and stopped. His emotions were rocking his body. He wanted to fall against a gate-post and weep.

He steadied himself, then went on, walking. A thought struck him, and he hailed a taxi and told the driver to hurry to King's Cross. He looked at his watch and found that he might just be able to catch a train. It felt supremely important to catch that train. He gave the taxi-driver double fare at the station and caught the train. But the station was wonderfully quiet, and he was alone in his compartment. It seemed that few besides himself wanted to leave London. Almost he changed his mind and went back—people must be waiting for more news.

No, he must get to Shepton, he must tell his wife and the boys—after all she would have to face it, so the sooner the better now—and he ought to tell Brandon too, and Lee, and young Brocklebank.

He let himself into Bentley's kitchen without ceremony, not having seen any one at his home, for his wife had been out and the boys gone to Bedford.

"Where's Brocklebank?" he asked.

And Ellen, clearing away the tea-table, answered, "In the sheds, I think. Why, whatever's the matter, Mr. Larkins?"

"War," he said, "we'll be at war by midnight. It's come."

Ellen sat down on the nearest chair. Mr. Larkins banged the door after him and was gone. She rose in a moment and went to tell her mother and Bessie; they were busy with George, who was in one of his fits.

The news of war stirred Sandy more than the night before when he had thought nothing could ever stir him again. He found Maurice and told him, and they went in to the girls. And they talked—talked tremendously, even Sandy was voluble.

"Why is Mr. Larkins so sure?" Ellen asked. "Won't the Germans have sense enough to go back?"

"God knows. No one thinks so anyway. They must have gone mad—they *want* war."

It seemed strange to go to bed and sleep through twelve o'clock.

And in the morning the war was on. Maurice, away to London early with the milk, brought back precious newspapers of the night before. Then came the *Daily Mail,* then a telegram from Arthur:

"Expect me home this afternoon."

The harvest went on, of course, men as they worked waiting a-tiptoe for news and more news.

When Arthur came home it appeared that he was already busy. "One of the chaps on the yacht had to go back to his regiment on Thursday," he said. "They're stationed at Biggleswade—funny, isn't it? And he wrote to me yesterday that he'd get me introduced to his colonel if I went along to-night."

"Why?" Nellie asked.

"Why? Because one must get into this scrap. It will probably be over in about three months, and one must get into it. They'll want volunteers for certain, and there'll be commissions going. I've talked to Latham a lot. Jolly good of Latham to take time to write to me, *I* think. Every decent man will want to be in it. You'd better come along with me, Sandy, and Maurice too—I don't suppose either Latham or the Colonel will mind."

Nellie's eyes had grown bigger and bigger. "Sandy can't possibly go fighting, nor Maurry either," she said. "What about the farm, and us in the middle of harvest too? What about us all here? And what about you being ordained?"

"Oh, I'll wait to be ordained till the war's over. I'm glad I'm not ordained. If I were they'd only let me go as a chaplain; now I can be a proper officer. What about it, Sandy?"

"By jove!" said Sandy. "I'd—I'd—would they take me on?"

"You bet!" Arthur answered. "Great hefty fellow like you, and used to handling men too. You're the very sort they want. Latham says the Germans are

about ten to one of our army. They'll be invading us in no time if we don't hold our end up. And then what about the farm, eh, Mother?"

Nellie wept and scolded and pleaded. It was the pleading that did it. "Sandy, don't go and leave us. Don't go and leave us. Whatever shall we do if you go off fighting? Whatever would your Dad think—you going off and leaving us? Just wait a bit and *see* if you're wanted. You *know* you're wanted here."

Maurice said nothing. He went out to see that the milk of the blue heifer was not mixed with the other milking. Raving because her little bull calf had been taken from her, she had broken through into the onion meadows, and her milk would probably be unfit for use for days.

Sandy went about his work sick at heart. He wanted to go with Arthur to see that Colonel. There might not be another chance to get into the scrap, as Arthur called it. Maurice could manage quite well, and he had said he would—for always—and this would only be for a little while. He would not go away while harvest was on, but it was sure to take a few days to fix up a thing like that. He was losing his chance of introduction to this Colonel. Oh, dear—if only his mother was not so upset about it!

He saw Arthur go and envied him so much that he spoke crossly to Bert Jinn and Maurice and was ashamed and made more cross.

At about nine o'clock a boy from Biggleswade brought a note from Arthur.

"Have seen the Colonel, and it will probably be all right, I think. The regiment is going off to-night at eleven-thirty from the station. It's a dead secret, so don't pass it on, but Latham said it would not matter if I told just you. You can come and see them go off if you like."

Sandy and Maurice met Arthur in Biggleswade under a gas lamp in the square. The dead secret must have spread pretty freely, for the streets were lined with people in the hot August night.

"Thanks for letting us know, Arthur," said Sandy. "It was decent of you."

"Pretty mean if I hadn't, I should think," said Arthur. "I believe it's going to be all right about my getting a commission. The Colonel's an awfully decent old bird. Nearly off his head with the sudden marching orders, and everything. And yet he had time to write me a letter of introduction to a man at Lichfield. I'm to go there to-morrow."

"Oh, to-morrow!" Sandy thought. "That certainly is rather quick work. The harvest will not be finished by to-morrow."

"No one really thought the scrap would come," Arthur went on. "It has seemed unthinkable to every one—even the army. I heard the Colonel ringing up a friend while I waited. The banks are closed, of course. He said, 'We're off to-night. For God's sake lend me fifty pounds?' "

"Hope he got it," said Sandy.

"Oh, I think so. They're a fine lot, these men. La-

tham told me—wouldn't mind my telling you. He says they're the best line regiment, and that's why they're going so soon. Did you know that some of our men were in France before the ultimatum expired? They were—on Monday night. Great Scot—that's only last night! Latham says the Colonel's the best man in the army really, only he never makes a song about what he does and no one gets to know. He said he wished I could have seen his men out on parade this morning—said it was just like commanding clockwork. Here they *come!*"

Came the thudding of feet, and the regular beat of jangling accouterment, and voices, lifted in song:

"It's a long way to Tipperary,
It's a long way to go,
It's a long way to Tipperary,
To the sweetest girl I know——"

Sandy felt his flesh thrill cold, the thudding came nearer and nearer.

"Good-bye, Piccadilly,
Farewell, Leicester Square——"

He could see the column. It looked like a jerking shadow, enormous in the darkness, like some prehistoric animal.

"It's a long way to Tipperary,
But my heart's right there!"

Thud, thud, thud, thud, thud, thud. It became almost unbearable. Sandy heard a sob behind him, and another, and another. "Gad!" he said, "I must get into this, I must get into this."

Thud, thud, thud, thud, thud, thud.

> "And we shan't be here in the morning
> We shan't be here in the mor-or-ning,
> We shan't be here in the mor-or-ning,
> Before the break of day!
> We shan't be here in the morning——"

Rank by rank they passed, carrying full kit, and very heavy it looked. Thud, thud, thud, thud, thud, thud.

> "We shan't be here in the mor-or-ning,
> Before the break of day!"

There was a cry behind Sandy. "There's our Tom! There he *is!*"

An elderly woman and a girl rushed out to the moving serpent, and hung around a young soldier. They were weeping dreadfully. Keeping his step he tried to shake them off.

A sergeant spoke. "That's all right, Mother, that's all right. You leave him alone. There, that's all right."

The two women dropped behind, and the young soldier went on. He had kept his step. As he passed under the gas lamp Sandy saw tears running down his face.

"Oh, damn!" he said, and looked away. "I must get into this."

"We shan't be here in the mor-or-ning——"

"Look, look quick!" Arthur cried and pulled his arm. "There's Latham. See him? No, you ass, look where I'm pointing. No, *there*—that tall chap. That's it. Oh, I'm glad I shall be in it to-morrow. That's Mowbray, the man with the mustache. Poor blighter, his wife's got pneumonia, one of the men told me—frightfully ill——"

Maurice had disappeared. Sandy saw him later at home, in his bed, before he went to his own. Maurice was sitting up hugging his knees, and his eyes stared black out of his white face.

"Sandy, this war's frightful."

"Yes."

"I took an old woman home."

"That one who clung on to that tommy?"

"No, the girl saw to her. It was another one. She'd come from Durham to see her son off, and she hadn't got here in time to speak to him, and she hadn't been able to find him. She'd forgotten where she was lodging, and she didn't seem to care very much. So we had a bit of a job to find it. And when we did find it, there was a girl sobbing her heart out because her boy's gone, and he—he ought to have married her before he went. She says he meant to."

It was the first time Maurice had looked on life. His

black eyes grew blacker. He seemed to Sandy like a little boy who has seen a bogy. He said, "It's frightful, this war. What are they *doing?* It's *mad,* it's mad! It's frightful—this war."

Sandy patted his shoulder. *"You're* not responsible," he said.

"Nor is that old woman, and that girl—nor those other two. Sandy, that boy kept his step. Did you see him? He kept in step."

"Yes."

"Oh, it's frightful—this war."

Arthur went off to Lichfield next day. His mother and the girls grieved over him; Sandy envied him. It was impossible to know what Maurice thought. He went about his work white and dumb. In the evening he slipped away on his bicycle, and came home late. Sandy did not ask him where he had been, because he knew he had been seeing his old woman and the girl.

Arthur turned up again the next morning. He was to go to Chatham and train in the ranks for a few weeks, then, very likely, he would be offered a commission. His departure to Chatham called forth no emotional display.

But the news from the front was disturbing. The papers seemed as though they were trying to make the best of a very bad job indeed. Our army was retreating, always retreating. Whatever the papers said we were being forced back by the Germans, and the Belgians were giving way too. Liége had fallen. The

Germans were coming nearer and nearer. Invasion stared us in the face—and defeat. Was defeat possible?

During August Bessie and Bert Jinn were married. It never entered the head of any one that the war should interfere with that arrangement, though they had a quiet wedding. Bessie came every day to Bentley after her wedding, and she and Bert had their meals there. At night, with great content they went home to their cottage in Shepton.

Casualty lists began to come out, and one of them descended on Biggleswade like doom. Sandy heard of the disaster in the auction yard. The regiment that had gone away so gallantly that hot night had almost been wiped out. The list of men one knew, or knew of, was awful. Latham was killed, the Colonel killed, Mowbray killed, Barling killed. The Vicar of Wrestlingworth had lost his son. Doctor Marin's son and young Clewley (a cousin of the Lees) were killed.

Sandy went from the yard to the recruiting station. They questioned him. "Occupation?"

"Farmer."

"That's an essential service."

"A what?"

"An essential service, a job that must be carried on. We may soon be entirely dependent on ourselves for our food supply."

They questioned him further, and told him they would be sending for men like him when the Germans had taken London.

He was sent back to farm Bentley. It was always Bentley—even now, when England was dying, he must not leave Bentley. England thrust him out from her service, and sent him home—to farm Bentley.

Afterward he heard more frightful things—men from St. George's at Brighton were killed. Ellis and Leech and Raeburn,—and Mr. Rutherford was in it, he had volunteered on August fifth. And Webster had gone—even Webster.

That night Maurice came to Sandy's room. He said, "Young Medlock's killed."

"Violet's brother?"

"Yes. I didn't tell you in front of Mother. Vickie was at Violet's when the news came. I wouldn't let Vickie say anything. She rushed home to tell, but I caught her. She's gone back—said Violet wanted her."

"Oh!"

"Sandy."

"Yes."

"Sandy, old man——"

A dread like a cold grip came over the elder brother. "Yes," he said.

"I don't know whether you'll think I'm letting you down, Sandy. I promised you I'd pull fair, and I meant it, but we didn't know about this war, did we? Sandy, I—I want to go."

Sandy said, "I expect you do. I won't keep you, Maurry."

Maurice said, "Thank you. I thought you'd say that."

"I tried myself this afternoon," Sandy told him, "but they won't have me. They say I've got to farm Bentley."

He could not keep the bitterness out of his voice.

Maurice was silent a moment. Then he said, "Ought I instead?"

"No," said Sandy. "They said such a lot about my blinking valuable experience."

The next day Maurice went to the recruiting station, and Sandy let him go with an ache at his heart that was very bad to bear. The farm was all dead and empty without Maurice. What if they sent him straight off as they had sent Arthur? What if he never came back? And how would Maurice ever stand war? He was nothing but a sensitive little kid. Oh, Maurry!

He did come back—in the afternoon—very much braced. His name was down, and he had passed the doctor—A1. He would be called up in due course. In the meanwhile he was to work at his ordinary job.

To Sandy it was a reprieve.

CHAPTER XX

A FEW nights later Maurice told Sandy that Tommy and Jimmie Larkins had both volunteered.

"I thought they would," Sandy commented, and said no more until Maurice suddenly asked him a question.

"I say, I want a pound or two. Can I have it?"

"Yes," Sandy answered.

"It's for that girl," Maurice volunteered. "She's—been sacked from her place, and she can't pay the lodgings, and she daren't go home, and she thinks if she could get north she might get into a factory or something. She says they're 'not so particular' in factories as in service. Sounds somehow rotten, doesn't it?" said Maurice sadly.

"But—you can't—possibly!"

"Can't what?"

"Give that girl money. You absolutely mustn't."

"Why?"

Sandy looked helplessly around the yard, and wondered where Maurice had come from, and where, during the twenty-one years of his life, he had been. He said, "Look here, we'll get Ellen to go and see the girl."

Maurice looked crestfallen.

"Ellen? Why?"

Sandy, reluctantly, but at some length, explained

why. Maurice was crestfallen still. "I—don't want Ellen to go," he said. "Ellen's always so dreadfully right. She'd be hard on Mary."

"Not she," said Sandy. "There's a lot more in Ellen than meets the eye."

"I'd rather Bessie went, if one of them must," said Maurice.

"Look here, you get Ellen to go. She's capable." He laughed. "She's capable of walking into the office of some Liverpool factory and persuading the owner to give the girl a job."

"Oh, yes, she's capable—if she wasn't hard on her. I can't send any one to be hard on her. She's suffered enough, and there's more to come."

Sandy looked at his brother and tried to see whether or not he was in love. But there was no expression on Maurice's face that could be interpreted into anything but worry.

Sandy said. "If Ellen's hard don't let her go, but I think she won't be. I tell you I've sometimes met more in Ellen than springs to the eye."

Ellen, when she was told of Maurice's Mary, was more than a little scared, but even Sandy was astonished at her knowledge of the world and its doings. She agreed to go and see the girl, and find out what could be done, and very nervously (for Ellen was occasionally nervous) she went.

The natural result followed, she wrote to Lucy, and Lucy told her mother, and Lucy's mother, after much work and patience, found Mary a situation—not in a

factory, which was what the girl herself wanted—but as servant in another doctor's household. Maurice was overjoyed; he went about the farm whistling and singing in high good spirits.

Sandy was much relieved. Maurice certainly could not be in love. Merely he had chanced upon some one needing help, and his soul had been sick within him until he had helped. His outlook was as single and as simple as a child's. And here was this war—and Maurice was going into it.

Ellen went back to Liverpool in due course, and in that December Maurice was called up. He went to train at Rugeley and when he had gone, Bentley (so Sandy felt) just echoed hollow. He became taciturn again; he got no other man in Maurice's place, for they were becoming scarce even as soon as that in Shepton. He and Bert and the other men worked longer and harder, and somehow got things done.

Vickie became violently patriotic like the rest, and suddenly realized that she might be useful. She was twelve, and tall and strong for her age. She learned to milk, and milked well, never neglecting the last ounce of "strippings." She wished that Sandy would allow her to take over the responsibility for the evening milking of the "London cows," but he would not hear of it. Tired out and silent he milked cows himself, leaving very little for Vickie.

"What won't you let me do it for, our Sandy?" Vickie pouted. "Ole George Bates says I can milk as well as a man now."

He did not answer till she asked again. He could not explain to his little sister that disappointment and dulness and hatred of Bentley were eating his vitals.

He said, "If I've go to work Bentley while the others go and fight, I'll *work* it. And that's that."

"But you *do*," Vickie persisted. "You work till you're just about ready to go to sleep on your feet."

Again Sandy answered nothing.

"What's the good of killing yourself working when I could help you a bit?" she went on. "And Bert doesn't do all he could if you'd let him."

Sandy was furious, and he fairly glared. "Look here," he said, "I'm not going to have you telling me how to run this farm, my baby girl. I want none of your impertinence. Run away and play."

Vickie ran, for Sandy's expression, more than his words, had frightened her, and she had never been frightened of him before. She could not understand why Sandy should be so angry. It wasn't only Bert who had said he could do more. She had heard several of the men grumble that "the master thought no one couldn't do nothink oney himself."

She found Bessie in the dairy and confided to her that Sandy "hadn't half put himself out. And it was oney because I wanted to help him," the child added.

"Well, there!" said Bessie. "Never mind."

"But he used to be so nice," Vickie sniffed. "What's the matter with him, our Bessie?"

"I think he wants to go to the war same as the other boys."

"Well, but he needn't be cross with *me*. I can't help it. I oney wanted to help him, and I don't 'alf have to stick up for him at school. And I do."

"Are they talking about him then—the children?"

"Yes. I told them he volunteered, and they sent him back."

"Well, that stopped them then, didn't it?"

"All but Georgie Bateman, because his Dad went and they sent him back, and then he went again and they took him. And their Tom said he was eighteen and he's oney sixteen and a half, and Georgie said our Sandy could go all right if he'd a mind."

"What did you say?"

"Didn't say nothing," said Vickie. "But I didn't half give him a warm ear, I'll tell you."

"Oh, Vickie, when *will* you stop fightin'?"

"I didn't fight, 'cos he never hit me back. He started to cry. I *was* glad I'd hurt him," Vickie added. "And now Sandy's horrid to me."

"I wouldn't put myself out if I was you," said Bessie philosophically. "He'll be all right in the morning. You see."

But in the morning the black mood was still upon Sandy. It grew into a permanent condition as the days passed.

Christmas came, and went, the Christmas that was to have seen the end of the war, and every one began to realize that it had only just started.

Occasionally, at long intervals, Arthur and Maurice came home on leave. They never happened to be home

at the same time. Arthur came first, very fine with his well polished field boots, his excellently tailored khaki, his bright buttons, his second lieutenant's star, and his Sam Browne. He bore himself soldierly.

As he sat down to his first meal with his family (having carefully taken off his Sam Browne to do it) the family could not help feeling proud of him. The contrast between him and Sandy (who wore his rough working clothes) was great, a stranger could hardly have believed they had the same parents.

He was very fine and condescending to Sandy, he made it perfectly clear that in spite of obvious differences he did still feel that Sandy was his brother, and meant to treat him as such. He had come home intending to be very nice to everybody. He had brought them all presents—expensive ones, as suited his position as an officer and a gentleman.

His mother was unendingly proud of him. She petted and caressed him, and hung on his slightest word. His opinions about military matters (he had many quite decided ones) settled all questions even before they arose, in Mrs. Brocklebank's mind.

She must have all the family wait on him. "Bessie, fetch Arthur's belt from the passage. Vickie, have you cleaned Arthur's boots? Bert, you'll slip on your bicycle and fetch Arthur's bag from Biggleswade, won't you? Bessie, any one'd think you'd oney be proud to polish Arthur's buttons—what he's doin' for you!"

"I would, Mother," Bessie said, "oney I haven't time. Can't Vickie do it?"

"No, Vickie can't," said Arthur, "with all due respect to her, she'd probably get the polish on the cloth. Hello! There *is* a bit of polish on the cloth. Oh, dear!" He took his coat from Bessie, and rubbed the spot, Bessie looking at him with anxious eyes. "By jove!" he said, "I'd tick my batman off if he did that!"

"I'm ev's'sorry, Arthur."

"Look, you ought to wrap a cloth round the button stick, like this. Perhaps you'd better do one button at a time."

"I'll do them, Arthur dear," said his mother. "Give it to me, Bessie. Now just show me again, sonny, how you wrap up this little two-pronged thing, and then I'll know."

Arthur showed her, and his mother (still very delicate) polished his buttons for him every day.

Arthur never came down in time for breakfast, and refused to have it in bed. He said he hated eating in bed. So every morning the breakfast things strewed the place until dinner-time, giving rise to much extra work and discomfort, but no one said a word. Sandy, riled almost past bearing, held his tongue for his mother's sake.

One day Arthur took Bessie and Vickie up to London and treated them to a matinée. They traveled first class, because An Officer (Arthur said) could not travel otherwise. They took taxis here and there. They sat in the dress circle in the theater, that being the cheapest place in which An Officer might be seen. They went to a very beautiful restaurant in Oxford Street

for tea, since An Officer (Arthur said) could not possibly be seen in an A.B.C. or Lyons.

Bessie felt, as she expressed it to herself, "out of place" in all these grand circumstances, and would have enjoyed much more a quiet little jaunt to town with her Bert—to the pictures and Lyons; but Vickie enjoyed the day as she had never enjoyed anything before. Quite frankly she swanked with An Officer. It thrilled her to see him saluted as she walked by his side, to see the deference that was paid to him, to note his lordly lounging air. She loved having good seats in the theater, she loved the play (the first professionally produced play she had ever seen); she thrilled especially when Arthur beckoned to him the girl selling chocolates, and bought two big boxes as if such an action were nothing, and gave one to her and one to Bessie. And when, in the café, he held his match aloft before he lighted a cigarette, and said to them, "Do you mind?" her cup of happiness was full.

It was like living in another world; it was as if Cinderella had come true, and she was Cinderella. They rode home in a coach—a real taxi all the way from Biggleswade station, and arrived in state.

That night, tired and supremely happy, Vickie threw her arms round Arthur's neck, thrilling again because she could be familiar with so magnificent a being.

"Oh, I *have* loved to-day," she said, "I *have* enjoyed it."

"That's all right," he said grandly, "that's all right."

He was quite genuinely glad that he had given pleasure.

Arthur sat in his chair till the rest of the family, except Sandy, had gone to bed. Sandy had taken off his boots, and was going wearily to the stairs, in his stocking feet. Arthur put his head luxuriously on the back of his chair and called him.

"I say, Sandy, I rather wanted to speak to you, old fellow."

"You've had nearly all the evening to do it in," said the tired farmer, "won't to-morrow do now?"

"Well, of course, if it's inconvenient. But it's rather private——"

Sandy came back and sat down. "Well?" he said.

"It's filthy lucre, old man."

"You seem to have a lot of it, Arthur."

"That's the point. An Officer must keep up appearance, you see. Every one knows An Officer of the Line can't live on his beggarly pay."

"There's no need to spend money like water while you're at home anyway."

"Good heavens! Do you grudge me just taking my sisters out while I'm home on leave? I can tell you some men——"

"You needn't have brought home all those expensive presents."

"Isn't that a bit swinish, Sandy? If I *am* a lot poorer than most of the Mess I'm not such a swine that I want to take it out of my people at home, anyhow."

The obvious retort sprang to Sandy's lips, but he

swallowed it. What on earth was the good of wasting breath in argument on such a man?

He said, "Are you in debt?"

"Well—er—a trifle. That, as a matter of fact, is rather the point."

"How much?"

"Well, nothing terrible—absolutely not a flea bite compared with what a lot of the men run into. I suppose in the aggregate, it will be about fifty pounds or so.—I'll tell you what I've been thinking, Sandy," he went on quickly. "You're rather making out of this business, aren't you? I don't know whether it has ever struck you that you are living peacefully at home while we go and fight for you, and you're pocketing the money that would have been paid for my college fees if there had been no war."

It would have given Sandy infinite satisfaction to have taken his brother by the throat and killed him. Never until that moment had he understood why it is that any one ever murders any one else. In that moment he understood perfectly. In his mud-stained stockings he went into the parlor. He unlocked his desk, and wrote Arthur a check for a hundred pounds. Quite silently he came back and handed it to him.

"By jove, Sandy!" Arthur exclaimed. "You're a jolly fine fella. Thank——"

"Damn you to hell!" he said, and made for the stairs.

Arthur was utterly amazed. "Why—why what in the world——?" he began.

"Do you think I don't want to be in this scrap too?" Sandy burst out. "Do you think I enjoy working like a slave on this dirty farm? Do you think I enjoy being out of uniform when every decent man is in it? Do you think—— Oh, I don't care a curse *what* you think. There's no more money where that's come from, anyhow."

He went to bed.

Arthur was left gasping. Sometime later he arranged his thoughts. "Sandy always was rather queer, and he never liked me." He put the substantial and comforting check in his pocket, and went to bed.

Two mornings later he again said good-by to Bentley, and his mother wept herself sick when he had gone. Arthur so seldom wrote, one heard so little of him when he was away from home.

They heard regularly every Monday morning from Maurice and from Ellen. She turned up somewhat suddenly one week-end at Bentley to talk about her future with the family. Ellen's situation was apparently this. She was teaching the blind, and she enjoyed her work, but she felt the call of King and Country, and as she was extremely fit and strong physically she felt she ought to go. There were quite enough teachers of the blind to carry on without her.

This decision had been reached in consultation with Lucy, and it was an act of very definite self-sacrifice, since leaving Liverpool meant leaving Lucy, and the parting hurt them both very badly.

Ellen's tears were dry and her heart brave before

she appeared at Bentley, and she discussed her affairs with perfect outward calm.

"What I think is this, Sandy," she said. "If I come home and work on the farm it will release a man."

"You know nothing about farming."

"No, I know. But I'm teachable, if you're willing to teach me. If not, I dare say I could get taken on as a V.A.D. I do know a bit about nursing, and I've had to do a lot of physiology in connection with teaching. I've got my Red Cross certificate for nursing and first aid. I got ninety-six per cent. for first aid."

"I should think that's your line then," said Sandy.

"Well, honestly," said Ellen, "I think it is. But all the same, if you had wanted to let a man go——"

Sandy's jaw set. "Any man who wants to go from this farm can go to-morrow," he said.

"But you can't work Bentley by yourself."

Sandy's blue black eyes, a little sunken in those days, flashed. "Any man can go who likes," he said, "and every man knows it."

"You know," said Ellen, "you're looking more than a little fagged, if you won't resent a sisterly comment. Are you *sure* you don't want me?"

"Quite, thanks."

"You're a good many men short now, aren't you?"

"Yes. I find I manage without them very well. I find I enjoy their room more than their company."

Ellen looked anxiously at her brother. "Sandy," she said, "you're—you're not somehow—going off at the deep end, are you?"

"Eh?"

"Well, I mean—your last remark sounds—well, rather churlish, if it's quite balanced."

Sandy was furious for a moment. He was alarmed sometimes to find himself so often angry. He said, "If I've got to run this farm I'm jolly well going to run it my own way."

"Oh, rather," said Ellen. "I was only thinking—I mean Maurry, for instance—you used to think he was quite invaluable."

"I wasn't thinking of Maurry," Sandy said. His eyes softened, and they began to talk about Maurice.

Ellen thought it was quite time he had leave.

"Arthur came to see me the last day of his leave," said Ellen. "He took me out to meet a friend, and they did me a theater and a dance and a supper. Oh, he treated me quite *en prince*. I *was* tired."

"But he went back to Salisbury Plain from here."

"No, he pretended to, he told me—because he said there would have been such a fuss with Mother if she had thought he was cutting off a day with her, so he told me not to let her know. He traveled to Salisbury Plain during the night—started at three A.M. rather, with this other young officer. They had some other girls attached during part of the evening. I don't know where from. I can't say I enjoyed it much. It's not my idea of a large evening—though it sounds beastly ungrateful to say so," she added. "I'm afraid I enjoy roasting chestnuts at my digs with Lucy a jolly sight better."

"How is Lucy?" asked Sandy politely.

"Oh, very well, thanks," said Ellen. "Very fit." She did not add that Lucy was taking their parting very hardly. She felt it best not to talk much about her friend.

Lucy felt that Ellen, going from Liverpool, was going from her life. Protestations from Ellen did not mend matters. She felt that the old age they had planned together was smashed to atoms, smashed by this frightful war that was smashing every one. Ellen was going into a new life into which she could not follow her, for Doctor Lowood would not hear of his daughter giving up the very useful life for which she had been trained for the sake of a girlish friendship. It was this war—this detestable frightful war.

At the moment when Sandy and Ellen were speaking of her, Lucy having gone to bed early, lay smothering sobs in her pillow lest her parents should hear them. And Ellen went to bed with a fearful heartache. Leaving Lucy had been just about the hardest thing she had ever done. She simply could not see life without the familiar nearness of that friend of hers. She felt that she had been called upon deliberately to do that which could not possibly be done.

"O God," she prayed as she knelt at her bedside (Lucy and Ellen always said their prayers), "O God, help us to be decent about it—help us to be decent."

CHAPTER XXI

THE next morning Ellen went to the headquarters of the V.A.D. She was accepted, and at the end of that term went to train.

Maurice came home in February. He arrived unexpectedly one Saturday night, very late, and he threw pebbles up at Sandy's window. Sandy, rising bleareyed from his weary sleep, went to the window annoyed that he was disturbed.

"Hello, Sandy!"

"Maurry!" he cried. "Hello! By jove, hold on a minute. I'll let you in."

Sandy was fully awake in a moment, perhaps more fully awake than he had ever been since Maurice left home. He ran down-stairs and let him in. Sandy's hair was ruffled, his eyes shining, his face flushed. He looked almost like a boy who has been given a holiday.

"You old bounder, you!" he said, as he patted Maurry's shoulder. "Why didn't you tell us you were coming? We'd have killed the fatted calf, and——"

A voice called from the stairs. "Is that Maurice?"

"Mother!" Maurice raced up-stairs two steps at a time and lifted his mother bodily in his arms in spite of her height, and ran down with her, and sat himself in the armchair beside the smoldering fire, and nursed her, laughing joyfully. Sandy lighted the lamp.

The noise woke Vickie, and she sat up in bed and

listened. In a moment she raced down-stairs in her nightgown and threw herself on top of her mother and Maurice, and they all laughed as though something had happened that was very funny indeed.

"Have you had anything to eat?" Nellie asked. "Vickie, there's a cold chop in the dairy. Set the table, child, and get him something to eat. Sandy, can you make the fire burn up again? Here, let *me*——"

Maurice held her tight. "Not much!" he said. "I've got you now, and you shan't get away. By jove, can't she fight? I say, Sandy, what have you been teaching her since I've been gone? No, you shall *not* go."

Nellie ceased to struggle, and they all laughed again. Sandy knocked the embers together, and recklessly threw to-morrow morning's dry chips upon them and made a blaze.

Maurice began to ask questions—how was his mother, and how were her legs—and did they still like Bertha Jarman as much as ever—and how are Bessie and Bert—and poor old George (he'd go up and have a look at old George presently)—and did Arthur look very fine as an officer? Oh, yes, he had been offered a commission, but he did not want it; he was with such a wonderfully nice lot of men, and it would mean leaving them—really an exceptionally sterling lot of men—they'd no idea. But how were the cows, and were the early crops showing well?—Maurice was an animated question mark. Although he had been told the weekly news by letter, he wanted to hear it all over again.

"It's a shame to have got you all out of bed," he said. "I got leave so suddenly, and if I'd waited till to-morrow it would have wasted a day. I meant to slip in quietly—and then *you,*" he said accusingly to his mother, "must needs hear me. You would—you always did hear if a mouse winked its eye."

The meal was punctuated by gales of laughter from them all, just as if Bentley had rediscovered the fact it once knew so well—that life is humorous.

They went to bed about half past two, and Sandy was up again at six, and Maurice with him—he was impatient to see all his old freinds, men and animals.

After breakfast Maurice, bootless, sat cross-legged on the hearth, polishing his buttons by the spit-and-rub method approved by tommies, whistling the while, because he was so glad to be at home again, and life, in spite of obvious drawbacks, is so full of a number of things.

Vickie said to him, "Hand over your boots, Maurry. I'll black them."

He looked up at her. "You jolly well won't," he said. "I did Arthur's."

Maurice grinned. "Ah," he said, "but his would be *brown!*"

Vickie made a dive for his boots, and he snatched them up.

"I'll fight you for them," she cried, and the two of them rolled and tumbled on the hearth-rug like puppies, laughing until they were almost helpless. Maurice won the fight, and ran away with his boots over

the yard to the saddle-room where the blacking things were kept, pursued by Bessie's voice, scolding him for running out-of-doors in his stockings, and Vickie, defeated, sought vengeance. She could think of nothing more original at the moment than an apple-pie bed. She went promptly, and made it well. But that night her own bare toes found all the family hair-brushes, and Maurice put a triumphant and jeering face round her door. She threw a pillow at it, and hit—she was a good shot.

Sandy, during the few days of Maurice's leave, became completely human again. And the farm was not only a dreary duty, it was a thing of interest, since Maurice was so absorbingly interested in it. He spent his leave helping Sandy. He went to market with him one day, but he enjoyed himself most at Bentley. His flowers needed him. Some of his violets were just beginning to appear. He planted out wallflowers and canterbury-bells.

He made two new hutches for Vickie's rabbits, and he helped in a great spring cleaning and whitewashing of the cowsheds. He was supremely happy—until the last night.

Then, sitting on Sandy's bed, as he used to do in the days before the war, he almost broke down because he had got to go away again. He had seen how greatly he was needed on the farm, how tired Sandy was. One or two people had spoken to him about Sandy, not exactly sneeringly, but calling him "the brother who stays at home," comparing the eldest

brother with Arthur and himself, to their advantage.

It had hurt Maurice a great deal, and he had put their minds right on the matter so far as he was able. He hoped Sandy did not know that that sort of thing was being said, but he was afraid he did know. As they had gone about the auction yard that day he had seen people look queerly at his tall and stalwart brother. One young flapper in the road asked him why he was not in khaki. Sandy had said, "Because I have to grow milk for little girls' porridge," but Maurice had seen that he avoided people's eyes as though he were ashamed.

He was ashamed—ashamed to be seen.

That was the fact that hit Maurice hardest of all as he sat on Sandy's bed. He said, "You're pulling more than your weight, Sandy." (Sandy began to bristle. Was even Maurice going to tell him how to run the farm?) "I mean," said Maurice, "you—you're carrying the farm and the family and everything, and you're doing it awfully well, I mean—I mean—you've been such a jolly good father to us all since Dad died, and I *did* mean to pull fair——"

"Don't talk such rubbish," said Sandy. "Pull fair indeed!"

Next day Maurice went away, and Bentley was terribly empty.

CHAPTER XXII

ARTHUR went out to Flanders, and in about six weeks he was home again, looking rather pale and very romantic indeed with his right arm in a sling, and he was welcomed by his family as a wounded hero should be—at least they did their very best. Unfortunately, there was so much work to do on Bentley that it was difficult to find time for a magnificent and rather helpless invalid.

Nellie was so thankful to have her boy at home that she did not seem to mind at all if the rest of her family half killed themselves with the extra burden of waiting on him. Arthur had been out fighting for them and was wounded, and anything that any of them could do was nothing but his due. She thought it very wrong-hearted in Bessie to want to sit down, even just five minutes, before she tackled the cooking of Arthur's late dinner, though she had hardly sat down all day. Arthur must not be kept waiting a moment beyond half past seven because he was used to dinner at half past seven. Bentley, of course, always dined in the middle of the day—late dinners were as rare as diamond tiaras in Shepton—but Prince Arthur must be served.

His mother cut his food for him and hung over him while he ate it, which was doubtless natural, but the others would have found more pleasure in serving Arthur as his due if he had not so accepted it.

No one grumbled. Sandy, working from dawn till midnight (Bert Jinn too had joined up and gone) made no comment until his mother remonstrated with him about his neglect of Arthur. On the third night since Arthur's coming he was sitting alone in the front room, deep in bills and accounts, worried with income-tax returns that he had no time nor brain energy to fathom properly, when his mother came to him.

"Sandy," she said, "I think you did ought to find a little time to be with Arthur. He don't see nothing of yer at all now he's come home and been fighting and got wounded to keep the farm for yer. It ain't very lively for him—with the pain in his arm an' all. You didn't ought to shut yourself up in here when you come in of a night, and Bessie gone home an' all."

Sandy was growing used to a complete lack of understanding in every one about him. It felt to him the normal condition. He was growing unexpectant of sympathy and unable to give it. He did not answer his mother until she spoke again.

"Sandy, sonny, can't yer leave them papers a bit and come? Do you *'ear* me?"

"Yes, I do," he answered roughly, "and I wish to goodness I didn't. You're hindering me a lot."

Nellie, terribly hurt, went back to Arthur and Vickie, and George, who sat huddled in his chair, his eyes fixed everlastingly upon the ceiling. Arthur was reading Ian Hay's *First Hundred Thousand* and chuckling over it. Vickie was darning stockings. Nellie sat down and began to darn too, and Arthur read out to them

tit-bits from his book—a scene of domesticity in the golden glow of the lamplight.

They were so arranged when Sandy came from the front room. He went into the dairy and lighted a lantern, put on his overcoat from one of the pegs behind the kitchen door, and went out into the night without a word to any one.

"Where's he gone?" Nellie asked.

Vickie poised her needle. "Oh," she said, "I expect it's one of the cows calving."

"He ought to have something if he's going to be up all night," said Sandy's mother. ("Something" obviously meant something to eat.) "Why, couldn't he just *say?* Oh, dear!"

"Shall I go and ask him, Mum?" Vickie suggested.

"Yes, do. I *wish* he wouldn't be so bad-tempered," she sighed. "He never used to be. I'm sure he was the easiest of any of yer, 'cept perhaps Maurry. Go on, child, do."

Vickie went and came back in a few moments. "Says he don't want nothing at all," she reported, and sat down again. "Ugh!" she shivered. "That don't half strike cold outside."

"Well, nothing's easily catered for anyway," said Arthur. "I think I'll go to bed, Mother. You've simply no idea how heavy an arm is till you carry it about with you round your neck."

"Ah," murmured his mother, "I'll come and help you. I'm ever so sorry Sandy's so queer, sonny," she apologized.

"Oh, that's all right, Mother, don't you fret," said Arthur. "Sandy always was a bit of a comic bird, you know."

"He was not," said Sandy's mother. "A sweeter-tempered boy never trod this earth."

Arthur smiled. "You remind me of what Major Hartington said just before the scrap that gave me *this*. He said that women always look unjustly at their own particular men, they see them in a sort of heroic glamour—and thank God for it."

Arthur put his sound arm round his mother and caressed her, tenderly teasing. He certainly looked heroic enough himself.

The next day he went to the Vicarage to see the Brandons. Helen was at home. Her mother had had a severe illness, and for some weeks it had been thought that she was dying, so Helen had left her voluntary nursing of wounded soldiers, and in a state of great anxiety had come home to nurse her mother. But as time passed, and the danger that she would die also passed, though she showed no sign of gaining normal health, Helen became mightily bored, while she saw at almost every road end the information in bold red letters that her King and Country needed her.

Maids, of course, were difficult to come by, and Mrs. Brandon felt that in doing without one her household was being very patriotic indeed. Helen had no hesitation in bursting that bubble as soon as it was formed.

"It's no more patriotic to keep me from nursing than to keep a servant from making munitions," she said.

Mrs. Brandon (after the manner of sick people) had subsided into tears, which Helen though absurd. Why cry about a thing that was perfectly obvious like that?

She said more to her father. "If Mother can't do the work herself some one else has got to do it. Why is it more patriotic for me than for a servant? I don't see that it will kill a single other German."

"But, Helen," said her father. "Your mother's so delicate yet. She needs you to look after her."

"She's not going to die," said Helen. "I bet you there are lots of spinsters in reduced circumstances who'd simply jump at the chance of coming to look after her. Now, that *would* be a decent bit of patriotic work."

"You hurt me, Helen," said Mr. Brandon. "You hurt me dreadfully."

"I'm sorry, Daddy," Helen said, "but it hurts me to have to give up my life and all I want to do. Why should parents be the only people who have a right to be hurt?"

"Very well," said Mr. Brandon, and sighed deeply. "I suppose you'll stay till I can get some one who'll come in, will you?"

"Well, naturally," she answered; "of course."

She thought a great deal about Sandy in those days, and had rather less patience with him than before. She told herself that of course it was difficult to stand up to one's parents, that it would be far easier just tamely to submit and to wilt and be miserable, but that she was made of sterner stuff.

Arthur strolled up the Vicarage drive and found Helen gathering September roses in the garden. He thought she looked very pretty—and so she did; and she thought he looked very manly and romantic—and so he did.

And that was how things began between Helen and Arthur. The aroma of Bentley clung only faintly to Arthur, and of course he was never going to live there; he was going to be a clergyman as soon as the war was over.

During the next few days Helen discovered that one need not necessarily be dull in Shepton even in war-time, and Arthur discovered the same thing.

He was very often at the Vicarage, which, of course, was known to the people of Bentley. It annoyed him very much to see Helen doing the housework. He could not hold in his indignation when one morning he found her scrubbing the kitchen floor. He raved.

Helen stood up beside her bucket. "Well, what would you do if you'd spilled half a basin of soup?" she asked. "Leave it?"

He grumbled something unintelligible.

"I can't leave the floor dirty, can I?" she sighed. "I hate it badly enough, but what's the choice? Bessie cleans your floors now Bertha Jarman's gone to munitions, doesn't she?"

"That's absolutely different!" said Arthur indignantly.

"Why?" asked Helen.

"Why? Because—because it *is!*" He caught her

hand. "Oh," he said, "don't let's pretend, Helen. You're miles and miles too good for me and my people, but—oh, Helen, will you marry me? If you will you shan't have *this* sort of thing to do anyhow, and I do love you, Helen, I do love you——"

He went off into poetical protestations. He told her that she was the light of his eyes and his soul's desire, and other things that other young men have told other young women many, many times before and since—things that always make interesting hearing.

About an hour afterward they went together to Mr. Brandon's study, thence to Mrs. Brandon's bedroom, where the invalid sat propped up in a chair.

Of course Helen's parents gave their consent to the engagement. It was rather a whirlwind affair. Arthur wanted to take Helen to London that very afternoon to buy the ring. But Helen delayed a little; she did not want to drop into his hands like a ripe apple. Arthur (furiously happy) misunderstood.

He said, "Oh, of course! What an ass I am! Of course you would rather come to Bentley this afternoon, and get *my* people's blessing. What a perfect darling you are, sweetheart, to think of it. And then we'll go to London to-morrow. I say, what about putting on the dear little bonnet and shawl and coming along to Bentley right away now?"

"But I must get dinner," said Helen.

"Oh, hang dinner! I say, you're looking quite pale with all this beastly work."

"I'm all right," said Helen.

"I don't believe you are."

"I am," she said, "really."

"Well, you'll come this afternoon, won't you? When? Shall I come back and get you after lunch? Half past two? Helen, what *is* the matter?"

"Nothing. Are you going—to tell them?"

"Rather! At least—not if you don't want me to. I'll stay and help you cook lunch."

"I think—I want you to go and tell them."

"Good! I'm longing to really. *Darling!*" He kissed her. "Half past two then." He went all along the road to Bentley whistling and twirling his swagger cane in the air.

Helen cooked the dinner. As she bent over a saucepan her father came in and put an arm round her.

"Are you all right, darling?" he asked.

"Yes, Daddy."

"Happy?"

"Yes, Daddy."

"Sure?"

"Oh, Daddy! Yes, of course."

"There was a time when I thought it might be going to be Sandy, Helen. And—I should have been a little sorry in one way for you to have married a farmer in his position, and yet—— I suppose there's a lot of worldly mindedness left in your poor old Daddy yet. God forgive me."

Helen was astonished to find a lump rising in her throat. "There's not one atom left in you," she protested.

"Well, well," he said, "I certainly shouldn't have opposed it, darling. And, well—I'll say it now, little woman, and get it off my chest for good and all. Sandy is very, very much my favorite of those two brothers, and I could find it in my heart to wish——"

"Oh, Daddy, don't say it to me!" Helen cried. "What a queer time to come and tell me that, when I'm only just engaged."

"There, there, I'm sorry, child," said her father. "I felt somehow I must say it. There, that ends it. No word like that shall ever pass my lips again. If you're happy that's my happiness, and your mother's too."

Helen's lips shook suddenly, and her eyes filled. She lifted a quivering face to her father's.

"Kiss me, Daddy," she said.

He kissed her, and she put her head on his shoulder, damping his coat.

"Why, what is it, little woman?" he asked. "Have I hurt you so much?"

She shook her head in his coat. "It's only—it's only —I'm not worth your love, and Mother's, and—and Arthur's."

He laughed. "Such nonsense," he said; "such rubbish!" He patted her shoulder and went back to his study.

CHAPTER XXIII

HELEN delayed going to Bentley. What with washing the dishes and tidying the dining-room, and attending to her mother, and with this and with that, it was almost tea-time before she and Arthur reached Bentley. She found that a special tea had been prepared for her and that she would have to stay for it. Procrastination had served her badly. She was given the best welcome that Bentley knew how to give, but she had to sit opposite Sandy during the interminable length of that dreadful meal.

Sandy never looked at her. She tried hard to make him, she felt that if once she could make his eyes meet hers she would know what he was thinking, but he would not look at her. He talked a little, he passed her bread and butter and honey and cake, and was perfectly polite and agreeable, but Helen felt that she had not caught a glimpse of Sandy, and that she never would do so again.

Directly after tea was over he went out, excusing himself because he was busy. "I've only old men and boys now, you know," he said, "and not many of them. Sorry to seem churlish, but you'll forgive me, won't you? *La guerre,* you know."

She felt much happier when he had gone, and as she walked home with Arthur and they planned their visit to London the next afternoon, she felt that if

only there was no Sandy she would be blissfully happy with Arthur. He was a most ardent lover.

And she did not in the least want Sandy. She told herself so again and again. Late that night she faced the position squarely to find out what was making her miserable and to eliminate it from her life.

But she found that she could not eliminate it. It was a shock to Helen to find herself up against something that felt intolerable, and yet had to be borne. It was Sandy's knowledge of her that she hated.

Arthur was in huge high spirits as he went to bed. He expatiated to Sandy on Helen's beauty, her virtues, her humility, her capacity for self-sacrifice.

When Arthur was asleep Sandy rose quietly and dressed and went out. He wandered down to the Low Meadows, to the field that had been an oat-field the summer the war broke out. He had brought Maurry there on his last leave to see the young beans sprouting through the richly dunged soil. That night the field lay still, bristled with wheat stubble. Sandy looked over the gate all night.

Helen grew quite used to Sandy's knowledge of her, since naturally it was never spoken of, and she became as happy as ever she had been in her life. Arthur made a gallant lover. He seemed to know just the way that an officer ought to treat his sweetheart, and in such a way he treated Helen. He often took her up to London and they did shows and shopping, and came back in high spirits.

By the time his arm was well and he had to go away again, he was pretty badly in debt. Once again Sandy gave him money, but this time without swearing at him. It had gone quite beyond that. He knew that indirectly, but actually, he was paying for the fashionable solitaire engagement ring that Arthur had given Helen. One does not express oneself in such a case. Sandy gave him a check, and did without some clothes he needed, and a new chaff-cutter, and one or two other things, and was silent.

Arthur was sent to a camp in Wales, and Helen elected to stay at home. Her parents were delighted.

Said Mr. Brandon to his wife, "I think we can be quite happy about Arthur, don't you? I'll confess I'm agreeably surprised. He's had this influence on Helen anyhow, and it's good."

Mrs. Brandon said, "Yes, oh, yes, very good." But she could not make herself care very much for Arthur. Helen had had no scruple about leaving her or house or parish duties at any time convenient or inconvenient, to go off with him.

Helen said that if she was to be the wife of a clergyman she might as well do parish work, and do it properly, and she threw herself into activities that had been her mother's—the parish clubs and the choir, and war savings. She was really astonished to find that her thirst for a post had left her. She had most thoroughly enjoyed being petted and taken care of by a man. It had sapped out of her every thread of desire for independence. And the war? And her King

and Country needing her, and all that sort of thing? Well, was she not giving Arthur? If it had not been for the war they would have been married right away. Had they not told each other so quite often?

And then a thing happened that seemed to make her sacrifice of Arthur the more poignant—Ellen Brocklebank suddenly got married. Characteristically Ellen had asked no one's advice, and she had not even told any one that she was engaged before she announced that she was going to be married. Equally characteristically, with that sort of half-defiant loyalty that was the result of Lucy, she refused to be married anywhere but in Shepton, and to have any one give her away but her mother.

So she swooped down on Bentley, sending an unknown young man to stay in the village until after the wedding. Of course he was introduced to her family. His name, it appeared, was John Dalhousie, and he was a Scotch doctor, and he had that peculiar charm which very clever, very gentle men carry around with them wherever they are borne on the surface of the round world.

He charmed Bentley. Its rough ways (rougher perforce since the war) did not in the least disconcert him. He seemed almost immediately to be everybody's special friend, for in his kindly eyes his kind were charming. Gentleness spread itself like an aura around John Dalhousie.

Vickie, talking to Ellen the night before the wedding, summed him up. She said, "I like your John."

Ellen laughed—she was soaked in happiness. "That's pretty obvious," she said. "You've hung round him ever since he came. He's quite flattered."

"Oh, we all like him," said Vickie. "He's made even Sandy talk. He likes you heaps and crowds better than anybody, but he reminds me of that ole wheezy definition of a friend some ole schoolboy is supposed to have said—knows all about you and likes you all the same. He seems to know an awful lot about everybody straight off, and he likes them; but it isn't 'all the same,' it's *because.*"

Vickie was astonished to see her sister's lips quiver and her eyes shine suddenly bright. Ellen said, "You're a perspicacious child."

Vickie went into the front room and took down one of the boys' old school dictionaries to find what perspicacious meant. She did not believe in not knowing things she could find out.

Lucy came for the wedding, and she shared Ellen's bed on the night before it. She was to be the only wedding guest, for John and Ellen were to be married as quietly as possible, with no bridesmaids and no reception. Ellen had wished to go away for the honeymoon from the church door, so as to give as little work as possible to the people at Bentley, but Mrs. Brocklebank had begged her to come back to the house if it were only for a cup of tea. The cup of tea had grown into a little wedding feast, and all was prepared.

Lucy talked about Ellen's innumerable interests until Ellen fell asleep. Lucy had no other dream to take

the place of that little dream house where she and Ellen were to have lived together until their lives' end. Ellen was the hub round which her life had turned, and now Ellen's hub was John Dalhousie. Lucy, as she lay awake, faced an indefinite stretch of void years.

Once Ellen waked and touched her. "Lucy," she said, "tell me again you're glad I'm happy with John."

And Lucy gathered her up in a strong long arm. "My dear," she said, "I'm glad, I'm glad, I'm *glad.*"

After the wedding, and after the little feast in Bentley's kitchen, where laughter and happiness diffused from two very happy people, a taxi drove into the yard bedecked with white ribbons, and Ellen and John Dalhousie went away in a shower of confetti. Sandy at once turned away, thanking goodness that it was over, and he could get back to his work, when he noticed Lucy. She was laughing with his sisters, but her eyes looked strange, much stranger than Bessie's which were filled with tears because Bert Jinn was so far away. Sandy had often seen the same look in the eyes of cows when their calves are taken from them. He was struck by an unfamiliar emotion—compassion. He would have liked to say something to her, but he did not know what. Words were becoming increasingly difficult. So he said nothing; he went into the house and changed into the breeches and leggings he wore about the farm, and went to his work. When he came in again Lucy was gone.

CHAPTER XXIV

MAURICE went to Gallipoli. That was about all Bentley knew of him, except that, through a series of rapid promotions he had become a sergeant. They had had several cheerful letters from him telling them (of course) nothing at all.

Arthur was kept in a training camp, not yet being considered quite fit for the front again.

Sandy's youth and physical fitness made his lack of a uniform more and more conspicuous as time went on. People turned round to look at him in the street whenever he went to Biggleswade or Hitchin or Bedford or London. He grew to dread market days as horrible ordeals that must be faced with a set mouth. But he faced them with downcast eyes. He almost looked the shirker that he felt. One day an old woman tackled him in the market.

"I s'think *you'll* make up your mind and go soon, won't you?" she said.

"They won't take me," Sandy answered.

"What!" cried the woman, obviously incredulous. "A big fine strapping young feller like you!"

"They tell me I'm indispensable."

The woman looked at him curiously a moment and her lip curled. "Oh, ah," she said. "All *my* sons have gone to fight. I've got five boys, and they've all gone to fight."

Sandy said, "Your husband—looks after the farm——"

"He's sixty-five and got rheumatics bad," she cried. "Do you want *him* to go?"

Sandy began a stumbling explanation that appeared to be worse than useless. He left it. From time to time others asked him if he did not think of going now. He found that very few ever doubted for a moment that he could go if he really wished to. They thought he was hiding behind his farm.

One day a box came by post for him, a big dress box, and it weighed light. He opened it in the kitchen and the lid came off with a burst of white feathers that flew all over the room. He said, "Some one has apparently been plucking a goose." And he went out. It was the last unnecessary sentence he uttered for a long while.

Bessie, angrier than one would imagine she could possibly be, gathered up the feathers and put them in the box again. She was glad no one had been in the kitchen with him but herself.

"It's a shame!" she blazed. "Oh, poor Sandy, it's a *shame!*"

She turned over the brown paper that had wrapped the box and tried to read the post-mark, but it was illegible.

"If ever I was to find out who did it to him!" she threatened darkly. "If ever I was to—*my!*"

The awful threat was drowned in tears. She wasted at least five minutes with her arms on the table cry-

ing for Sandy. Then she got up and risked setting the chimney on fire, and made a fearful mess of her well polished grate by burning the obnoxious parcel therein.

"No one shan't know oney me," she whispered, and stuffed and poked it until it was consumed.

Vickie, coming in a few mintues later, wanted to know what the beastly smell was, like singeing chickens—and she was not told.

As the months passed there came a day when rumor went around that "they had fetched young Brocklebank at last." Under Lord Derby's scheme Sandy was called to the recruiting station, and there, standing naked before his neighbors and his own farm lads, themselves also naked, he was passed as medically fit for active service—and sent home to farm Bentley.

Thereafter opinion of Sandy's staying at home had to change a little. In a time of conscription one's choice is at any rate limited. People still turned to look at him in the streets. "Do you think he's got consumption?" he heard a girl ask her friend one day. "These big men have sometimes, you know."

"Conscientious objector perhaps!" the other had said, and they had laughed.

Two men in khaki came up to them, and one of the girls spoke again. Sandy did not catch the words, but they all four glanced at him and roared with merriment. Evidently some one had managed to say something very funny indeed. It was the sort of thing that happened pretty often—a lonely sort of thing.

About three days before Arthur went back to France

Sandy had the most surprising letter from him that ever came to his hands.

"Dear Sandy,

"A wonderful and beautiful thing has happened to me, and I want to tell you about it. When I first came to this Welsh camp I heard of a man who ran a little chapel where people were flocking to hear him, and I heard of people being healed of apparently hopeless diseases, and I did not believe it. Some of my men went to the chapel and got converted, and God forgive me, I mocked at it all. And one night I went to hear him just for a lark. Oh, Sandy, I wish you could have heard him too! I knew as I sat there that I who had dared to offer myself as God's minister, and but for God's intervention would have been ordained by now, had never been converted and washed from my sins. I shall never forget that night. I saw myself as a hell-deserving sinner damned eternally. Sandy, He saved me that night, and washed all my sins away. 'The Blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin.' (I John 1:7.) Oh, it is beautiful! You have no idea of the happiness of knowing that you are sinless. ["Good God!" Sandy exclaimed, "Arthur's gone mad."] I go to the services as often as ever I can.

"And now my prayer is all for you at home. It is dreadful to know you are all lost sinners going to hell, Mother and all of you. I don't like to think about Dad. May God bring all of you who are left to a sense of your sin while yet there is time to repent.

"I don't know what to do about Helen. The Word of God says, 'Be not unequally yolked together with unbelievers' (II Cor. 6:14). And yet in another place it says 'The unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband' (I Cor. 7:14). But I think that is when they are already married. I shall not write to Helen till I see my way clear. I am now separated from the world unto the Lord.

"I enclose a tract for each of you, and may the Lord bless them to you and convict you of your sins. The red one is for Mother. You do not know what it is like to be pure and blameless in the eyes of God; if you did you would be ready to give up everything—yes, *everything* to do His Holy Will. I shall have something to preach about now when the war is over, and I dare promise you that any one who hears me will never forget. I shall not go into the Church of England. It has too much learning of this world, and does not cut itself off from the pleasures of the world, either, which I have done. Of course I have to keep quiet about these things in the Mess, but it is quite Scriptural. Our Lord Himself said, 'Cast not your pearls before swine!'

"Your loving brother

"Arthur.

"P. S. I think we are due to go to France quite soon.

"A. B."

Sandy read this letter at first with a feeling of horror, then of physical nausea. He trembled for his

brother's brain, and then for his brother's bride. He turned the letter back and read it again. Then one sentence struck fire into his own brain. It filled him with fury so that his face whitened and his eyes blazed in his head—"I don't like to think about Dad."

As if he took Arthur by the throat he took that letter and the fluttering tracts that came with it, and screwed them round and round and threw them into the heart of the fire.

That night when all the work was done Sandy gathered some flowers from Maurice's garden, and took them to his father's grave. It was a still night, cool after a hot day, and the place was wrapped in an intense quietness. It was quiet, quiet and still. Peace was there, so deep, so still, so cool. He bared his head above his father's grave in a sort of dumb homage and humility, and stood so in the darkness.

Ten days later as he crossed the yard a telegraph girl came through the gates and gave him an orange envelope. He was expecting a telegram from a cattle dealer the other side of Bedford about the dispatch by train of a half-dozen bull calves and he opened it casually enough.

"Regret to report," he read, "Lt. Arthur S. Brocklebank killed in action July 1st."

The yard swayed before Sandy. He put a hand on the pump to steady himself. The telegraph girl from Biggleswade, who knew the message she had brought, looked at him compassionately, and waited.

"All right," he said, "I—I suppose there's no answer."

He stuffed the telegram into his pocket and strode over the yard to the little barn, trying to gather strength to go and tell his mother. He sat down on a pile of cattle cake to think. He took the telegram out of his pocket and read it again. Yes, the thing was true that he had seen. "Regret to report Lt. Arthur S. Brocklebank killed in action July 1st." It was signed by Arthur's commanding officer.

Arthur dead! A strange and shocking thought—— He heard himself mutter, "It'll about finish Mother. It'll just about finish Mother." And then in a moment he muttered, "Oh, poor girl, poor girl! I do hope she doesn't really care for him. I do hope she doesn't really care for him. I hope she doesn't really care for him." There seemed to be something steadying in repeating words. "It'll just about finish Mother."

A head appeared round the barn door, and a piping boy's voice asked Sandy a question. "Am I to clean the calves, sir? 'Ave you 'eard if they're a-goin' today?"

Sandy said, "Clean them anyhow, Bill." And then he rose and went into the house.

It was an hour before he came out again, a very dreadful hour. He had broken the news with the utmost gentleness, trying, as it seemed to Vickie, to use himself in some way as a buffer to take the shock. But news like that carries its own weight, and Mrs. Brocklebank was prostrate.

Sandy said, "I'm going to the Vicarage now, Mother." He patted her shoulder and kissed her, and went out.

He hoped to see Mr. Brandon, but Helen met him on the door-step. "Daddy's out," she said, "but he'll be back any minute now. He went out about an hour ago. Sandy, are you well?"

"Quite, thanks. Er—I'll come back."

Helen's face had gone pale. "Has—has anything happened?" she asked. "Is Arthur—— Sandy, I've not heard for days—— Is—anything——?"

"I'll come in, and tell you," he said.

She took him into the study. "Is he killed?" she wailed. "Oh, tell me he's wounded or something, don't tell me he's killed."

"Oh, Helen, I wish—I could——"

Helen sat down, her face perfectly white. Sandy handed her the telegram. She read it, and was silent.

All at once she exploded. "Oh, oh, oh!" she cried, "why must *he* be killed; why Arthur, when other people aren't—heaps of other people aren't?"

Mr. Brandon came into the study, and Helen cried, "Arthur's killed, Daddy, Arthur's killed!" She flung herself into his arms, and then suddenly thrust him away. "Why have you told me prayers are answered?" she asked bitterly. "Why have you taught me that? It's nothing but a lie. I hate God, I hate God! I've prayed and prayed for Arthur to come home safe, and God hasn't taken the slightest notice. If it's true He's almighty He's nothing but a cruel monster to break

His promises to a poor little thing like me. I wouldn't treat a child like it. I wouldn't treat a worm in the garden like it. I hate Him, I hate Him. Why have you lied to me all my life and told me that He answers prayers? Oh, oh, I hate you—I hate you and God!"

Mr. Brandon gathered her up in his arms, pressing her head to his breast, stroking her dark hair. "Oh, my darling, my own little girl," he said brokenly, "if only I could bear it for you!" Tears ran down his face on to Helen's hair.

Sandy went from the study, back to Bentley, almost ashamed of his thoughts, they were so mixed with thankfulness. It might have been Maurice. Oh, poor Helen! God and her father help her! He was helpless.

It might still be Maurice. Oh, dreadful! Let him get to work quickly. Of course there would be things to do, about Arthur's affairs—debts probably—poor old Arthur——

It was about a week later that the news came that Maurice was dead: he had died of dysentery in Gallipoli a few days after Arthur was killed. The telegram that carried this news was handed to Sandy as he came home from market one day. The little girl, afraid of what her message might mean, had waited for him at the end of the lane. He stumbled into the kitchen and put the telegram on the table and sat down. This time he could do no breaking of news, no saving of shocks.

Vickie snatched up the telegram, and screamed,

"Maurice!" and put her head in her hands and wept and screamed with all her heart. Nellie and Bessie cried too as if their hearts would burst. Sandy sat turned to stone.

Presently he got up and went out. Bentley lay before him bathed in the sunshine of the summer afternoon, and he hated it, hated it bitterly, as Helen hated God. He was conscious of very little but that absorbing hatred. He turned out of the yard and went to the Low Meadows, to that gate over which he had leaned all night, not very long ago; over which he and Maurice had looked at the oats. There, with one foot on the lowest bar, he stood.

Maurice was dead, and it seemed as if he were dead too. He thought, a little plaintively, that it was unfair to have to go on living when you were dead. All these other people, his mother and sisters, and Helen and Mr. Brandon, were alive but he was dead. If he had not been dead he was quite sure he would be minding quite a lot about Maurice. As it was he seemed to be looking on at somebody, some acquaintance of his, who was apparently in great trouble, and who kept repeating, "Maurry, Maurry, Maurry," with dreadful poignant monotony, but he himself had very little to do with this individual.

The dusk was gathering when he heard his name called shrilly. "Sandy! Sandy!" Vickie came running toward him, stumbling a little and all out of breath. "Oh, Sandy, come quick," she gasped. "Mum's ill, awful——"

"What's the matter?" he asked, and turned with her toward home.

"I dunno. She fell down in a heap in the kitchen, and she moans and won't move. I haven't half been looking for you a long while."

"I'm sorry," Sandy said.

"And a telegram came about those bull calves to go to Bedford, and I didn't know what to do. I sent Bill with them to the station. Was that right? They said they'd send to meet them on the four-fifteen."

"Quite right," he said. "Good girl, Vickie! I ought to have remembered."

They passed Maurie's flower-bed, and the scent from his roses seemed to rise and meet them. Sandy had to stop a moment and hold the wall to steady himself. Vickie mistook his action. "Oh, don't dawdle," she said, "do come."

Mrs. Brocklebank lay on the kitchen floor where she had fallen; Bessie had her head in her lap, and she was trying to force some brandy between her teeth. George sat huddled in his chair. Possibly the feeling that something was unusual had penetrated even his blank brain. He reacted to the strange atmosphere by laughing, so that the room was filled with his cackles, and he pointed upward.

Bessie looked at Sandy with infinite relief. "Oh, I *am* so glad you've come. What are we to do, Sandy? Oh, whatever are we to do with Mum? —If only George would stop it! He's been on like that very near an hour.—She won't take no brandy—nor anything."

Sandy lifted his mother in his arms and carried her to bed. He sent a boy on a bicycle to Biggleswade for the doctor. "You remember," he said to Bessie, "her legs went wrong when Dad died. It'll be the shock." He sat by Nellie's bed till the doctor came.

It was the shock and Nellie crept only very, very slowly back to life.

That night Sandy locked himself in Maurice's room. He found a little will in his brother's own handwriting. In it, with Maurice-like simplicity and thoroughness, he had left every one of his family some little possession of his. "To Mother, my Bible; to Arthur, my other books; except those about rabbits, which I want Vickie to have, and also the rabbits themselves. To Ellen, my bicycle, which she might exchange, if she likes, for a woman's or sell it. To Bessie, my ties and handkerchieves and boots, because they fit Bert, also my fruit knife for herself. Everything else to Sandy, and if I have any money in the bank I should like him to divide it equally between everybody." The childish document was signed but not witnessed. With it he found Maurice's post-office savings book. It was the same book in which was entered that pound that his father had given him long ago when he started all his children with a post-office account. Maurice had saved twenty-three pounds seven shillings.

One little top drawer was filled with all sorts of odds and ends, a few screws and a few cartridges, a leather strap, two buckles from a belt, a whistle, an old notebook. Sandy thought this drawer had probably not

been cleared for years. He recognized the old things he saw there, each with a separate pang of memory. He took out a small white object, a little screw of paper. Evidently it contained coins, and something was written on it, in the handwriting of Maurice when he went to Shepton school, but made very small to fit the space. Sandy took the tiny package to the lamp to read it.

"For Sandy, if he will have it, because I have lost Celia Jane."

He opened the paper. It held half a crown and a shilling and four pennies. Sandy was torn by one tearless shattering sob. He folded up the coins again and put them back.

In the lowest drawer lay Maurry's farm clothes. Sandy himself had brushed them and put them there when he went away. He laid his hand on the corded breeches and the rough tweed jacket, and then suddenly caught them up to him, sending the leathern leggings with a soft clatter on to the carpet. He sat on the floor and held Maurry's farm clothes tight in his arms, and rocked his body to and fro, and to and fro.

CHAPTER XXV

THE next morning Sandy again went to the recruiting station. They knew him fairly well by that time, but they had no idea how angry he could get. He spoke in short chopped sentences, and his weary eyes flashed. They were human and sorry for him. His name went before the local committee—and he was told that owing to the food shortage his work and experience were more valuable than ever before. They sent him back to farm Bentley.

A few days later a letter from France came to Arthur's mother. Sandy opened it because she was not well enough, and read it to her. It was from Arthur's commanding officer, and it gave an account of his death. He had been shot while rescuing a man from No Man's Land—a wounded German who was dying of thirst. Arthur had staggered back with his burden to the trench, and had fallen into it—dead. The letter ended with fine manly expressions of praise and sorrow.

Naturally this letter was treasured at Bentley and at the Vicarage, and spoken of with pride and tears. Sandy was awestruck and puzzled. Was this supreme sacrifice the result of Arthur's "conversion"? Had he gained something besides the nauseating self-righteous froth that had appeared in his letter? Had he really become a man capable of unlimited selflessness? Well,

he had done it, anyhow. He had given his life for his enemy. What more can man do?

And yet—and yet—Sandy hated himself for the thought that would obtrude itself even when he longed most to honor his brother—was this thing merely the result of Arthur's everlasting ability to do the proper thing? He had always done the proper thing. Was it dearer to him than life? He had always gone with the swim—when he was a child, and then at school, and then he must volunteer the first day of the war, and then he had gone with the religious swim in the Welsh revival, and now with the courageous swim in France.

And yet he had died nobly. There the fact was, the solid rock in Arthur's shifting sand. Whatever had made him do it, he had done it. The fact was solid, and it was a fact good to know, ah, very good to know. It was good and humiliating both to Sandy, he could not help a sigh of bitterness for the chance—only the chance—to do the same.

Life mattered so little now Maurry was dead. He became if possible more silent, and the lines in his face grew deeper. There was only one thing that ever moved him in those days: his hatred of the farm.

Once or twice Bert Jinn came home on leave, bronzed and well, except for a cough. He was a good, faithful, quiet boy; he grieved to see the change in Sandy.

"Master's queerer'n ever, ain't he?" he said to Bessie, when one blessed first night of leave they sat again

over their own fire in the cottage in Shepton. "Don't never speak to nobody, does he? Does he get on your nerves, old girl?"

Bessie sighed. "Poor Sandy," she said. "He took it so hard over our ole Art and Maurry, and Mother getting ill."

"Well, you've lost 'em too, and got your Mum to wait on an' all. Seems queer you can keep sweet and he can't."

"If it wasn't for our young Vickie always so lively I don't know what I'd do with 'em together sometimes," Bessie owned. "What with Mother as she is, and poor little George, and Sandy with never a word nor a smile, and you a-away, I dunno——"

"Lor', cheer up, my darlin'," said Bert Jinn. "There was a feller oney comin' in the train to-night saying the war can't last no more'n another three months, if it does that."

Bessie broke down. "I can't bear it," she said, "I can't bear it."

But she did bear it, just as every one bore life in that time of nightmare—very well.

Sandy certainly "got on their nerves" at home. Vickie was frankly thankful when he went off to London or to Hitchin and the place was free of his presence for a definite few hours. Mrs. Brocklebank, the invalid, beginning just to creep about the house, was also (but very secretly) glad of her gloomy son's absence whenever he was busy away, and she fretted sadly for the livelier two who were dead. Even Bes-

sie, whose kind heart yearned over him, could not suppress an occasional sigh of relief when she saw him go.

Vickie left school when she was fourteen, and had no other ambition than to help on Bentley. Sandy offered her more schooling, but she refused it. She wanted, she said, to do a job of work; and very useful she was. She was tall and strong and lithe and sensible, apparently older than her years. Before she was sixteen she looked almost a woman—a very pretty one with her bobbed curling hair and her keen blue eyes and her beautiful pink and white skin. Mr. Brandon called her "an English rose," to Bessie's pride and delight. But if Vickie was an English rose, then English roses have very firm chins. She began to have ideas about the farm.

"Sandy," she said one day (she had pondered the point some days before she spoke of it), "why don't you plow up the onion meadows and plant them with beans or something a year or two to clean them? They'd grow pretty near anything, new land like that."

"Take too much cleaning," said Sandy.

"Well, you could do most of it with the horses. It would only be when the beans were up——"

"Goodness, child, do you think I've not thought about those meadows? Dad and I talked it out when you were a baby."

"Sandy," she said another day, "why don't you make them dig a little runnel from the pond into a trough in the yard? There's a tiny brook runs into the pond, so it wouldn't go dry if it went down a bit, and

it wouldn't half save some pumping. Of course you'd keep the old pump trough in case there was a drought."

Sandy did not trouble to give Vickie his reasons why not. He had quite a number, but none of them, and not the pond either, were worth the discomfort of talking.

"Sandy," she said one afternoon when she had been to Biggleswade on her bicycle, "did you know that all Thorne's machines are to be sold by auction Friday week? They are——"

Sandy raised his eyes. He was listening anyhow, and that was quite enough encouragement for Vickie.

"Why don't you buy the threshing-machine, Sandy? We could do our own bit then, and hire it around, and make ev'such a lot. I know I could drive the ole engine. Eeee! I'd love to drive the ole engine. Me and ole Bill could go round with it. I know I could manage with that ole boy."

"Don't talk so silly, Vickie," said her mother. "As if *you* could go a-threshing."

"Well, I know I could then," she said, pouting. "Couldn't I, Sandy?"

"You're not going to," said her brother.

"Why don't you buy a motor-lorry and run the milk right into the depot in London?" she asked him another day. "You'd save the rail fare and the loading and unloading and carting in London, and two horses, and very near two men's wages before you'd done, because I could drive the ole lorry, and they'd oney have to unload for me at the depot."

"Don't talk so silly, Vickie," said her mother. "*You* drive a motor-lorry!"

"Well, why not?" she demanded. "If ole Poll Sanderson and ole Dorothy Lee can drive a motor, I think *I've* got sense enough."

"They don't drive lorries."

"The engines are just the same on a car or on a lorry."

"They don't drive in London."

"I know they do. Ole Dot Lee goes to London nearly every week. And Maggie Geeves is driving one *in France!*"

"Well, I don't want you to drive a motor in London anyway. I don't like these motors. You'd get killed for sure."

"I shouldn't, Mother."

Sandy said nothing, but he thought over this latest suggestion of Vickie's. He weighed in the balance, beside the monetary matters (for even a light lorry meant a big outlay) his mother's fears about Vickie. She certainly had had enough to bear without adding anything else. On the other hand Vickie wanted it so badly, and she certainly had reason on her side. She was perfectly capable of doing the job, and their mother would soon get over her fears when Vickie had returned safely once or twice.

So after a week or two he bought a lorry, and Vickie was wild with delight. She had got her license to drive by declaring that she was "in her seventeen," which was perfectly true, and in those times of stress and

strain, good enough. That evening she collected her numerous friends from around the district, and "christened" the lorry by giving them a party in it—bread with real butter, and tea for which they had all been told to bring their own sugar. These young people, aged from fifteen to eighteen, sat cross-legged on the lorry, and ate and drank, and sang and laughed and shouted—unusual sounds for Bentley's yard, and Bessie was delighted with them. She bustled in and out to them with tea and bread and butter, waiting on them with more happiness than she had had at Bentley for a long while. She had made them two sponge cakes that were a surprise, and delicious.

It gave Bessie real pleasure to cut those cakes into the biggest slices that she could that every one might have a fair share, and to see the evident enjoyment with which they were eaten. She liked to hear these very young people singing *The Long, Long Trail* and *Tipperary* and *Pack Up Your Troubles.*

Once Sandy passed them, and he raised his hat as he went by to Vickie's friends. The singing faded out, and the laughter ended. He was the death's head at the feast. One and another thought he had better be going now, or said that "Mother" would be wondering where she was. It had been an awfully jolly party—awfully—and thanks no end, and good luck to the bus!

The bus did, apparently, have good luck. Poor Mrs. Brocklebank was almost wild with fear the first time Vickie went to London, and indeed she never got over

watching the window when it was about time for the lorry to be coming home again, but she did cease to worry unduly. Vickie was an extremely capable young lady, very well able to take care of herself and a lorry —and most other things, at any rate if her own view was to be trusted.

Armistice came in November—the end of the war—and the world sighed with relief unutterable, and squared its weary back to take the burden of peace.

Bert Jinn came home, still with his barking cough, but with nothing worse, and of course Sandy gave him his old job. Len Stocker also came back, having left three fingers and an eye in Italy and acquired a wife in Durham, whom in due course he brought to Shepton, and he also was given back his job although his maimed hand was a hindrance at the milking. Other men drifted back, and a little maid was imported into the kitchen. Bentley became normal—normal without Maurice.

Sandy thought sometimes that he never really knew till after the Armistice that Maurice was dead. He still worked fiercely, it was the only way to bear his heartache and his hatred of the farm that had robbed him of all that was dearer than life—honor and love and Maurice. If Bentley had let him go, he thought, Maurice might still be alive. He determined that as he was indispensable to the farm, the farm should continue to feel his hand, and feel it heavily. Nothing made him angrier than if one of the men tried to do some of his work to spare him. He resented initia-

tive as a personal insult. He listened only to that one of Vickie's suggestions; he simply did not answer her, and in time even Vickie ceased to suggest.

She often brought her friends to Bentley. She seemed to have innumerable friends—mostly boys, with whom she conversed in the easiest terms possible, speaking sometimes in the frankest possible way of things that her mother and Bessie considered "private." She was off in the evenings here and there to dances (though she never neglected the lorry) always looking very pretty and rose-like.

Drew on the beginning of the agricultural depression, when after the artificial inflation of the home market, the markets of the world were again open, and the British farmer found himself beginning to be unable to compete, and many farmers failed, and many farms were left desolate, because no one could afford to run them.

For Bentley the situation was not so serious as for many farms, because the demand for fresh milk is always with us, but still the situation was anything but cheerful for any sort of farmer, and some of Bentley's custom slipped into other hands. Competition in the market became keen, and one was at one stroke protected and paralyzed by the government regulation of prices. Still, there are ways and means. Farmers with other things to sell besides milk naturally made the best of their opportunities, and Bentley began to struggle if not for existence at least for any sort of prosperity.

"I wish Sandy would get rid of a few cows and keep some pigs," Vickie said to Bessie and Bert Jinn. "Ole George Bates was telling me that Dad's granddad *made* Bentley on pigs."

"Well, tell him," said Bert, and smiled.

Vickie shook her head, and Bert laughed.

But one thing that Sandy did pleased her greatly: he bought a comfortable car, second hand, but in good running order, and he drove himself to market and to London, and to Bedford and Hitchen.

It came in very useful for Vickie too.

CHAPTER XXVI

One afternoon when Sandy was in Bedford he heard a strange rumor. There was a man, they said, who was preaching in the Corn Exchange every afternoon and evening for a fortnight or more, converting people, and some said healing sick people with his touch, a Welshman——

Norman Lee, at home again, and little the worse for his war service, seemed rather struck by the rumor. "I've a good mind to stay and hear the chap tonight," he said. "Coming with us, Sandy?"

Sandy declined with a heat that startled Norman Lee. He had not thought Sandy capable of heat. He asked for an explanation, but did not get one. Sandy's curious manner made him all the more determined to go.

He came back to Shepton and told Mr. Brandon what he had seen, and one day Mr. Brandon went to Bedford. He went the next day, and the next. On the following Sunday he preached a sermon on miracles of healing, and Sandy listened and wondered about George. If other people were being put right why not George? According to Mr. Brandon this man (the same who had converted Arthur) was a whole-hearted if (in some ways) mistaken, saint. Had there been some root of reality in Arthur's conversion? Could there be some reality in these modern miracles?

Sandy sat and pondered while Mr. Brandon spoke. "We sing to Christ, 'Thy touch has still its ancient power,'" he was saying, "but we don't believe it. This man does. I should like, I should love for you all to go to Bedford and see with your own eyes whether he is right to believe it or not. We will sing hymn number twenty, *At Even Ere the Sun Was Set.*"

The congregation rose and sang. It was touched and startled and somewhat incredulous. But Mr. Brandon always had told them the truth.—Queer!

Why not George? The matter sank in Sandy's mind and simmered there. Some weeks afterward he went to see Mr. Brandon. He had not been inside the Vicarage since he had brought the news of Arthur's death. Helen was away staying with friends. She still lived at home, although Mrs. Brandon was quite well enough for her to have gone away had she wished to do so. She drifted on from day to day. She read many novels, and visited friends. It was said that she was almost engaged to a man in London.

Mr. Brandon was surprised at seeing Sandy, and he welcomed him in. It was saddening to him to see his favorite grow up so gloomy and taciturn. He took Sandy into the study and put him in a big armchair before a comfortable fire, and told him to light his pipe. He lighted his own, and waited for the reason of the visit to reveal itself.

Sandy said after a while, "I've been thinking about George, and—and this healing business——"

"So have I," said Mr. Brandon.

"Do you think he could be cured?"

Mr. Brandon looked Sandy in the eyes. "Yes," he said.

"It's hard to believe."

"It's very hard to believe. It's hard when you actually see the things happen. You know—I don't think it ought to be, if we believe what we say we believe. Of course, if we don't the issue is perfectly clear, but if we do—— Why should it be thought a thing incredible with us that God should raise the dead? There's a lot happening nowadays, you know—a number of men seem to be specially gifted in this way—there's Hickson and Maillard and others in our own church, you know—the Guild of Health and the Divine Healing Fellowship and so on. One can read of marvelous things happening, wonderful cures. And then there's a sort of independent fellow, a very fine man I believe called Howton, and then this man, and others. And *why* not? I can not for my life see why not, and unless our belief in prayer and everything else is totally unsound——" He paused. "It—it isn't unsound, Sandy," he said.

They gazed into the fire, Sandy remembering the last time he had been in that room. Words floated in his memory. "Why have you lied to me all my life and told me that He answers prayer? I hate you and God!"—"Oh, my darling, if I could only bear it for you!"

Sandy said, "Did you really see anything happen at Bedford?"

"Yes, I did," the Vicar answered. "I saw a great many people made a great deal better quite suddenly. I saw them move limbs that had been helpless; I saw them read through eyes that had been almost sightless; I heard people who had been stone deaf declare that they heard a whisper—and answer questions too."

"Did you see any one there like George?"

"No."

"Is every one who goes, cured?"

"By no means."

"Why?"

"I don't know. It worries me. Christ healed them all when He was in the flesh."

"Do you think George would be cured if I took him?"

"Oh, man, you do put me through it," said Mr. Brandon.

"Do you think there'd be a chance?"

"Yes, I do. I wish—I wish I saw things clearly, Sandy. I wish I could be more help to you. 'Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.'"

Sandy was embarrassed for a moment. When he spoke again he tried to bring the conversation back to a more normal tone.

"You see," he said, "when Dad was alive he made a great point of trying to treat us all alike, and give us all a chance in life, and even if—if—things have not turned out as he planned, that was his aim, and he left me to carry on, and I have tried to give them all a chance, and you see, if this is George's chance——"

"Yes. Quite so. I believe the man's in Kensington now. I've got his address somewhere. Ah, here we are." Mr. Brandon took out a note-book.

Sandy went back to Bentley very tired and much embarrassed. He had not talked so much for years.

One evening he told Bessie that he was going to take George to London and asked her to get him ready.

"Wherever are you taking him?" Nellie asked.

Sandy answered, "I've heard of a man in London who may do him good."

"Has John Dalhousie told you?"

"No, Mr. Brandon. It's all right. No one will hurt him."

Sandy took up the heavy and inert boy in his arms and carried him to the car. George rolled his head and laughed, he had laughed a great deal since the news came that Arthur and Maurice were dead. Mrs. Brocklebank called after Sandy, "Hadn't you better have Bessie or Vickie with you in case he has a fit?" But Sandy was driving out of the yard by that time, and if he answered Nellie did not hear.

When Sandy had found the hall in Kensington he drove off again in search of a garage, and having disposed of the car in a place about ten minutes' walk away he carried George in his arms through the lighted streets back to the hall again.

A man at the door, wishful to sell him a hymn-book for twopence, greeted him, beaming joyously, as though he were a long lost brother, and addressed

him, in fact, as "brother," thereby causing Sandy to shrink.

"Have you brought the boy for healing?" he asked.

And Sandy said he had.

"Well, well," said the man with real compassion. "God bless him—and you, brother."

He conducted Sandy a little way up the hall, which was already well filled, and delivered him to another beaming man, whom also he addressed as "brother," and asked him to get Sandy and his burden a seat near the front.

As Sandy followed his guide, a portion of the congregation suddenly burst into song, and Sandy, for one agonized moment wondered whether his progress up the hall was the cause of it, but soon found that it had nothing to do with him, it was a sort of spontaneous combustion.

"I've got that happy feeling deep down in my heart,
I've got that happy feeling deep down in my heart,
The sin that caused the ache
I told the Lord to take,
I've got that happy feeling deep down in my heart."

Sandy dared to turn his head and look about him. Certainly it seemed as if these people had got a happy feeling. Their faces beamed like the face of the man at the door. But so had Arthur had a happy feeling when he wrote that letter—a very revolting one. They sang on and on about having it, and then (again spontaneously) the song changed.

"Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
I have passed the riven veil
Where the glories never fail——"

A woman behind Sandy leaned forward and spoke in his ear. Sandy was uncomfortably conscious of her breath. "You've brought the boy for healing, brother?"

"Yes," he said.

"Do you know the Pastor?"

"No."

"He's beautiful. Ah, God bless the poor boy! The Lord's equal to it, isn't He? He's equal to *anything!*"

Sandy did not respond.

"Do you know the Lord, brother?"

Oh, horrible! Sandy wanted to get up and flee. Only the determination to give George his chance held him in his seat. The woman persisted. "Do you know the Lord, brother? Are you saved?"

Sandy's soul shrank in his body. He felt he knew where Arthur had got his terrible letter from. He wondered how Mr. Brandon had been able to stand it at Bedford, but he was spared any more from the woman behind him, for at that moment the preacher and his helpers came on to the platform. He was a shortish man, strongly built, and his face was strong and beautifully modeled. His expression was as of love and joy—a radiant and compelling personality.

Sandy felt a great deal more comfortable for his presence. As the service went on Mr. Brandon's three

days' endurance became less and less wonderful to him. There was more hymn-singing and Bible-reading and prayer, and although sometimes he was amazed and repelled by statements that were made, he felt himself gathered up into an atmosphere he had never breathed before—an atmosphere in which faith and love and joy became a real and an actual force, a compelling power. Once or twice he felt a catch of perfectly unaccustomed emotion, something near to tears.

The preacher gave out his text. "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things."

"The Lord never said, 'Well done, good and successful servant,' " said the preacher. "He says, 'Have you been faithful?' He doesn't say, 'Have you done anything big for me?' He doesn't even say, 'Have you done anything very good or beautiful?' He says, 'Have you done the little job I've given you to do?' "

Sandy, gazing into the penetrating eyes of the preacher, felt his heart answer, "Yes."

"Well done!" said the preacher.

Sandy hid his face in George's shoulder. It was the suddenest thing that had ever happened to him in his life. That "Well done!" broke his heart. He lost sight of the preacher, and failed, except in snatches, to hear what he was saying. Almost the voice might have spoken from the quiet above his father's grave; it was as if that "Well done!" had come to him from Christ. It was his reward for all the dry years of dogged faithfulness.

It was the sympathy of God. It touched him with terrible gentleness, with understanding so perfect that it was insupportable. He whispered to it, "But Maurry died." And the understanding enveloped and overwhelmed him. He pressed his face in George's shoulder, fighting tears, struggling to keep some sort of self-control in this gentleness that was too strong for him, this love that was too tender to be borne.

When at last he managed to wrench his thoughts again to listen to the preacher, the sermon was nearly over.

"And even," the preacher was saying, "even when we blaspheme God, gnawing our tongues for pain, is He holding Himself off in horror from such wicked beings as we are? I tell you He is bending over us then, He is saying, 'Child, this pain you're bearing, I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry it breaks my heart to see you suffer like this. Won't you let me bear it for you?' That's what love *is,* I tell you. Can't you hear Him, when we were so poisoned with our sin we were driving the nails into His hands (He is not thinking of Himself at all), '"Father," He says, "forgive *them*——"' Oh, I tell you we never killed Him by crucifixion, His Heart broke—for your misery. Can't you yield yourself to a love like that? What have you to be afraid of? Wouldn't it be the best thing that ever happened to you if a love like that took charge of all that concerns you? Won't you yield to Him? Shall we bow our heads?"

Heads were bowed; Sandy's face was buried again

in George's shoulder, and words were floating through his memory—— "You have lied to me. I hate you and God!"—"Oh, my darling, if I could only bear it for you!"

"By jove," he said, "the man's got it right. Love is like that, that's just what love *is* like."

George twisted in his arms, and Sandy looked at him. He thought, "A love like that must mind terribly about George. Poor little kid, poor little helpless kid!"

Tears ran down Sandy's cheeks; he could not hold them. Oh, poor little helpless kid!

They were singing another hymn——

> "Jesus knows all about our struggles,
> He will guide till the day is done,
> There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus,
> No, not one.—No, not one."

The invalids were being conducted to the platform. Some one touched Sandy on the shoulder, and he rose with George in his arms, lining up with the others. The singing went on, and the preacher prayed with one and another of the sick people as in turn they sat on a chair before him.

And Sandy saw things happen—stiff limbs moved, deaf ears heard, a woman who came on to the platform with crutches went away without them—and he was not in the least surprised. When there is a love like that why shouldn't things happen? Why not?

He expected that George would be healed. The preached beckoned him to the chair, and he sat down,

nursing George. The man's kind eyes looked into his and then looked at the boy, "Oh, dear!" he said. "O God, how the devil does get his grip on us. What a dirty *shame*—the dear child! God bless his little heart. Your boy?"

"My brother," Sandy said.

The preacher saw before him in Sandy a tall strong man with the face of an intellectual, bronzed by out-of-doors; clothes and manners that seemed to speak of a public school, a wordless man, and suffering—a rather puzzling person.

And then he caught sight of Sandy's hand—an incongruous member, for it was the hand of a farm laborer, and Sandy was in part revealed to that doctor of souls. As he went on his knees he caught the hand to him. "Ah!" he exclaimed, as if it told him much. "Jesus knows all about our struggles." Tears flushed into his own eyes. He said, "I admire your faith, my brother. I do."

He began to pray for George; he prayed with all his heart, laying his hands on him.

Nothing happened. Three times he prayed, but nothing happened? George's eyes still turned to the ceiling, his great head still nodded helplessly on the feeble neck.

"Well," said the preacher, "we must believe that God has touched him, and that from to-night he will never be the same again. Do you believe that?"

Sandy nodded. The miraculous thing was that he did believe it. He knew what love was like.

Down from the platform he carried his burden, and sat in his seat. He was disappointed, of course. Just as he had said, "Maurry died," he said, "George isn't cured," and once again he was overwhelmed by the sympathy of God.

It was terrific, he could not bear it, he must get away from all these people, away by himself.

He took up his hat and coat and carried George out of the hall into the cool freshness of the night. There were very few people in the street. He was glad of that. And still that Presence went with him, and all his life seemed to float before him in review—his childhood, his father's death, Maurry's death, Helen, that dreadful letter of Arthur's, Arthur and Helen, the farm without Maurry, his own early ambitions and his feeble struggle for them, the loneliness of the war—indispensable—indispensable.

And at every scene that great voice said to him, "Well done! Well done!"

Suddenly he staggered up against a wall with his burden in his arms. He said, "Oh, but I've done so badly!" and emotion burst its dam. He wept, as it seemed, like a child in the very arms of God. Oh, if what he had done was well done, he could go on doing it for ever. If that was the job that had been given him to do, good God, it was a glorious job! The hatred of it that had turned his heart bitter rose up to condemn him. "I haven't done well," he said, "I've done abominably."—"Ah, but *I* understand."

By and by he went to the garage, found his car, deposited George inside it and paid the mechanic.

" 'Scuse me, sir," said the man, "should yer like me to fetch yer a drop of anythink from the hotel? You don't look not just hardly the thing, sir—if you'll excuse *me*."

"Thanks," said Sandy, "I'm all right."

He sat himself in the driver's seat and pressed the self-starter. The mechanic looked in at the window. "If there was anythink as any one could *do* like——"

Goodness! Was the world chock-full of kindness? Even mechanics in garages? Sandy's eyes filled again. It was really the limit, this feebleness. He must drive out on to some lonely stretch of road, and stop the car a while, and think, and get steady.

"Would you like me to take her out for you, sir? Bit of an awkward corner just here, if you're not used to it——"

"No, thanks," he said. "If you'd just pilot me out——"

The mechanic went to the garage entrance and motioned him to come.

CHAPTER XXVII

SANDY turned his head and looked on a world for which there was no explanation. There was light before his eyes—squarish—a window, and a bed, and another bed. His head ached indescribably, and he felt very sick. He drifted back into nothingness.

He woke again and saw a square light. Oh, yes, a window, and a bed, and other beds. Apparently he himself was in bed. Strange! Some one was bending over him and deliberately but very gently rousing him by stroking the back of his hand. A man's voice said, "Hello, old man!"

Sandy saw a huge face in a whirl of sickly light. It was a face he had seen before and he felt he ought to know it. And then Ellen appeared in the same sickly whirl, and she was very huge and she had a hat on, and she said, "Hello, old Sandy!"

He heard the man speak again, and he said something about this state of semi-coma being perfectly usual. The words "perfectly usual" stood out suddenly clear, like a lamp in a street at night.

A nurse was washing his face. Lamps were lighted. No, gas. No, electric lights.

He said, "What——? What——?"

"What *what?*" asked the Nurse in a friendly, half-teasing tone. "You've decided you'll wake up, have you?"

"What's—this place?"

"A hospital."

"Hospital? What am I doing here?"

"Getting better."

"What from?"

"There was a motor accident. I wouldn't bother if I were you. You're getting on splendidly."

"An accident? Did my head get it then? It aches horribly."

"I expect it does. Never mind. You'll be having something for it in a little while, and then you'll go to sleep and be ever so comfortable."

The Nurse left him. His head ached more and more every moment. He had not thought it possible that anything could ache so much. And it worried him badly that he could not remember anything about any accident, and the Nurse, who seemed omniscient, had disappeared, so he could not ask her about it. He thought he would ask her when she brought the thing that was to ease his headache.

But he did not ask her, because when she brought it there was not under heaven time nor space nor sequence of events. There was nothing but raging pain.

Vickie was sitting by his bed, her big blue eyes looking at him very anxiously.

He said, "Hello, Vickie!"

She was delighted. "Hello, Sandy!" she responded.

"How's—things?"

"Oh, not too dusty."

"Mother?"

"All right—now."

"And Bessie—and the rest of them?"

"Er—all right."

"Who's—carrying on?"

"Me."

"You!" He began to ask her questions about the farm. What had happened about this, and what had Bert Jinn done about the other? Had Allport (a Bedford dealer) paid his bill, and had Vickie banked the money? Had there been any new orders for milk—and many other things, to all of which questions Vickie gave him soothing answers.

"I'll soon be home again," he said. "I'd be all right now if my head would stop aching—if I could remember."

"I wouldn't worry about it."

"I don't remember anything about any accident. Except—did I take George anywhere?"

"Yes, to a doctor in London. I wouldn't bother, really, Sandy."

"Is he in hospital too?"

"No."

"Wasn't he hurt at all?"

Vickie did not answer, and Sandy became angry. "Tell me at once," he said.

Vickie's lips shook with fear. "Oh, Sandy, *don't.* You mustn't get upset. Don't. I will tell you. Even Mother says it's a blessing, now. And the Doctor said it was all so quick, he never felt a thing, not a thing——"

"Was he killed?"

"Yes," said Vickie.

Sandy tried to turn his head, but he couldn't.

Vickie said, "Oh, Sandy, the Doctor says we may thank God he went like that. He told Mother it was the very, very best thing that could have happened for poor ole George. He says if we knew what suffering that had spared him we shouldn't do nothing oney say, 'Thank God.' And Mr. Brandon says he—he'll be all right now, Sandy. He'll be like any one else now—oh, *don't* cry."

Vickie was crying herself because she was terrified. She had never seen Sandy weaken before, and here he was feebly dropping tears about George, and the more she said to comfort him the worse, apparently, she made it.

Presently Sandy said, "What caused the accident? Is any one else—hurt?"

"No, nobody else. No one knows what caused it. You drove into a lamp-post round a corner seemingly. Some one who saw you said you skidded. But the mechanic at the garage said you weren't well yourself after you'd brought George back from that doctor you were going to. He says he offered to take the car round the corner for you——"

"Yes, he did," Sandy said. "There *was* a lamp-post!"

The pain was rushing back at him out of the shadows where he lived so much in those days. He said, "When—when—are you going to have the funeral?"

Vickie answered, "Why, it's over, three weeks ago."

Three weeks! Oh, this pain! It was upon him. It had come. As Sandy had said once, "Maurry died," and then "George isn't cured," so now, with memory working in a maze, he said, "Oh, my head, my head!" and sank into a strange peace in a dazzling wilderness of pain.

One afternoon John Dalhousie came and sat by Sandy's bed, and Sandy recognized the face that he had seen first of all, but now it was shrunk to normal proportions, and it did not whirl.

He said, "It's grand to see you so much better, old man."

Sandy smiled—he did so like John Dalhousie.

"Ellen and I drove out and saw your mother yesterday. She's longing to get you back to Bentley to nurse you herself."

"How is she?"

"Oh, wonderfully well. She was upset about you at first, naturally, but she's got wonderful pluck, you know."

"John, I'm worried stiff about them at home——"

"Why?"

"About the farm. Bert Jinn's a decent fellow, but brains aren't his strong point, and there's only Vickie to see to things. I can't think how they'll manage. I do hope I'll be about again before long. Shall I?"

"Oh, we'll hope so. A few more weeks——"

"Weeks? By jove, things will be in a mess."

"See here, man," said John Dalhousie, "they're

managing extremely well, so far as I could see. Your business just now is to let go of those things and not worry. After all, you know, some one always carries on. We're none of us indispensable, are we?"

The words hit Sandy's mind, but he did not argue, he had not the strength to do it.

John said, "We're all so thankful you weren't killed that minor things slip into their places, old fellow. Don't be worrying about the farm."

"It's all very well," said Sandy.

"Yes, I bet it is," said John Dalhousie. "A fool townsman coming talking wise to you. Oh, but we do so want you well."

When Vickie came again he gave her many detailed instructions about the cattle and the hedges and the plowing. He told her to get from somewhere two extra hands—Norman Lee or Mr. Larkins would help her to get them, he was sure. He told her what hedges to mend and what heifers to sell, and innumerable other things. Vickie listened, and said very little except, "And do you want such and such? And would you like such and such?"

Sandy was dead tired when she went, and he had his headache very badly, but he felt that he had dealt with the situation as well as circumstances would allow. He was easier for it. He wished he had told her to bring his check-book so that he could give her money for the wages. How ridiculous to have forgotten that! And she must have forgotten too, unless—— Oh, no, she must have been using that money from

Allport, she said he had paid. That was all right then. She must have been getting the money to pay the men for a month from somewhere.—Well, he would try to do as John said, and not worry. It was all out of order, but it could not be helped for a week or two more.

Vickie did not come very often. Of course they were busy at Bentley, and over forty miles away; but one blessed day John brought Nellie to see her son, and Sandy felt almost as he had done when he was a schoolboy. He lay with his hand in hers, and he hated to see her go.

He managed to speak once during the visit of George. "I suppose I killed him, Mother."

"*You* kill him!" Nellie exclaimed. "When you'd oney taken him out to do him good! As if you'd have had the accident if you could have helped it."

"I don't know anything about it, Mother."

"No more didn't George, darlin'." She wept a little. "It was God's own mercy if we can oney think of it right. I wish you could have heard what Mr. Brandon said. You don't know really, that man's kindness. I'm sure he hasn't known how to be kind enough to me since the accident, nor Mrs. Brandon either. But what he said about George being like any one else, now, and with Dad and the boys, I just felt I should be a real wicked woman to wish him back, and him well and happy.—You don't want to fret, sonny."

Sandy said, "It's only—thinking of him all right, and everything."

Nellie spoke as if Sandy were her little boy again. "Yes, darling, Mother understands about it all.—There."

John Dalhousie and Ellen came when they could, but Sandy's most frequent visitor was Lucy Lowood. She lived near the hospital, head mistress of a blind babies' school, and she was often commissioned by Ellen or the people at Bentley, to take Sandy fruit or clean handkerchiefs or other small wants. As she was busy in the daytime Dr. John Dalhousie got round the Sister of Sandy's ward to allow Lucy to visit in the evenings. The Sister consented willingly enough. "She can come any time she likes," she said. "It'll be all right."

Sandy had never been overwhelmingly fond of Ellen's friend, but when she became his visitor from the outside world he looked forward inevitably to her visits, and when she found that he enjoyed her going—that it pleased him—Lucy (staunch friend) went as often as ever she could. Sandy began to wait all day for the evening, hoping that she would come. He was much disappointed if an evening brought no Lucy, and immediately began to look forward to the next evening. She never missed two running.

He began to talk to her, as every hospital patient does, about the life of the ward—the patients, the nurses, the doctors. One poor old man in a bed higher up the ward never had any visitors, and so Lucy went to talk to him, and one day took him fruit, and another cake, or a paper. There were other lonely men

whose eyes followed Lucy hungrily, and she went to speak to them. Sandy became almost jealous. These people took up a great deal of the time that was his.

But he liked to watch her; he liked to see the men's faces brighten as Lucy neared their beds. She was very popular in the ward and Sandy felt a pride in her, but he was very glad when she got it all over and came back to sit by him.

She told him about herself and her work and her little blind babies, and Sandy found himself greatly interested. He almost felt he knew the little handicapped mites that Lucy taught and mothered in her school. He said one day, "I think they're extraordinarily lucky to have you looking after them, those babies. I mean, you make them so much more than just your job."

"Oh, I love them," she said, and her eyes kindled. "So would you; they're adorable. And they're my life nowadays. I love them."

"Yes," said Sandy, "that's the point, isn't it? It must be great to be in love with one's job."

"Rather. Aren't you in love with yours?"

"No. I used to hate it. But I don't hate it now. It has its very strong points."

"It's a very useful job anyhow. What on earth your people would have done without you all these years I can't think."

"It's what they're doing now that worries me," said Sandy. "It worries me blue."

"Oh, you mustn't worry! After all, people always

do carry on, don't they? I've really felt quite hipped with my people for managing so fearfully well without me since I came to London."

Sandy laughed. "I'm afraid there's no chance of Bentley's hipping me like that," he said. "There's simply no one to carry on—and here I am—lying here——"

They grew more and more confidential as the days passed. They began to store up the happenings of each day to tell each other in the evenings, until at last they almost felt that no happening was complete until the news of it had been passed on. They found that they agreed on many things that matter, such as the equality of man, the folly of war, the sanctity of friendship. They became quite thrilled to find on how many subjects they agreed, so that one evening they were terribly disappointed when they found themselves up against a serious difference.

It was Sunday evening, and Lucy called in at the hospital on her way to church. "I always go," she said, "except when I simply can't. I hate missing, don't you?"

"Well—er—well—I do go," he said, "fairly often. It would break dear old Brandon's heart if he thought my father's son was a castaway."

"Is that all you go for?" she asked.

"Well—er—perhaps not—er, well——"

"Don't you like church?"

"We-e-ll——"

"Like some sort of chapel better?"

"Dear, no. But am I hurting you, Lucy?"

"Oh, it's idiotic, I've no right to be hurt. Only these things matter such a lot to me, Sandy."

"I'm awfully sorry," he said.

"Sandy, don't you believe in anything? What do you believe in?"

He hesitated and flushed red. "Oh, Lucy," he said at last, "I can't."

"I'm sorry," said Lucy quickly, "I do apologize."

A barrier of awkwardness fell between them, hurting them both surprisingly. Sandy tried to struggle over it.

"It's just my stupidity, Lucy," he said. "I'll tell you some day."

"Never mind," she said. "Why should you?"

"I should like to. It's only the words I can't find. But I'll tell you."

"No," she said, "please. I won't have you reciting your creed to me, and then perhaps being sorry you've done it."

"You'll come to-morrow? You're not offended?"

"Goodness!" she exclaimed. "Of course I'll come."

CHAPTER XXVIII

After Lucy had gone Sandy lay and wondered how he could "recite his creed." His thoughts on the subject did not take the form of words, and he found it very difficult to shape them into words at all. In what words can one recite an utterly simple belief in the character of a person, a belief so simple that it has little to do with any system that has grown up about that person? Yet he did so want to knock down this barrier between himself and Lucy. He wondered whether he could tell her about the night of George's death, but the very thought of speaking of it filled him with shame. Words flung open the door of his inmost sanctuary, desecrated the loveliest—and he had no other religion to profess. He felt that even if he could shape his words his best would seem like a poor little creed to a person of Lucy's mind.

He found Lucy's lonely old man standing by his bed. "I'm going out to-morrow, Mr. Brocklebank."

"Good for you," said Sandy. "I wish I was."

"Ah, you've got somewhere to go."

"Haven't you?"

"Only lodgings. They don't want yer if yer ain't well, especially in lodgings. Not but what they ain't *kind*. Only they don't want yer, naturally. I wish I could have said good-by to that girl of yours. She was off so quick to-night."

"That girl of yours!" Sandy wondered whether he ought to correct the man, but he let the mistake go, for he found it pleasant.

"I don't know what I've got better for," the old man said. "When I was bad it seemed as if it was so important to get better, and now I wish I hadn't."

"Oh, come," Sandy said. "Isn't this just because it's hard to pick things up again?"

"No," he said. "It ain't that. No one wants me, you see. I'm no use to any one. I expect you don't know what it feels like when no one needs you?"

"No," said Sandy gently, "I don't know how that feels."

"You can't get much lower."

"I expect you can't."

"I had a sister once—invalid. Bad in bed she was for years. I kept her out of the workhouse, but I thought—God forgive me, I knowed better before she'd been dead a day."

"I bet you did."

They were silent a while. Then Sandy said, "Do you know anything about farm work?"

"No. Only horses. Why?"

"Because I'm a farmer. I wondered if you'd got a job."

"Dustman I am, with the Council at Guildford. I expect they'll take me back. I drive a wagon."

"Jolly useful work," said Sandy. "I've often thought that when I've driven into London in the early morning. A worth-while job."

"Ah," said the old man. "Not so bad." He cheered up a little. "I expect there'd be a lot more people bad with bacilluses and germs and things if it wasn't for us chaps. You can sometimes do people a turn too. You've no idea how careless they are throwing things away in their bins. You'd be surprised the things I've found—brooches and pen-knives and money.—Well, you wouldn't believe. I've a young feller goes round with me now, and I keep telling him. 'Jim,' I says, 'always look what you're a-tippin' out of the bin. You may be carting off the Duchess of York's terrara for all you know, and she'll be a-lookin' for it.' And they're that pleased when you give 'em their things back, as if you'd brought 'em from the moon."

Sandy suddenly laughed. "You're an old humbug," he said. "You're a very useful man, and very badly wanted. I'd like you on my farm if the Council have filled your place. You could help with the horses. Leave me your address, won't you? My—my girl—will want to write to you when she finds you've gone. And mind you answer her letters or she'll be awfully disappointed."

The old man went back to his bed smiling, and Sandy turned on his side. To turn was a new accomplishment of great importance. As he had said, "Maurry died," and "George isn't cured," so that night he said, "I'm needed, I *am* needed," and he went to sleep in peace.

Vickie came the next afternoon. The doctor had examined him in the morning and decreed that he could

go home in about a fortnight. So he was glad to see Vickie and tell her the great news. It was over a month since she had come to see him. He expected that her eyes would shine with great relief that he was coming home to do his work, and that she would say, "Thank goodness for that!" or words to that effect.

To his astonishment she went a little pale. She said, "Oh, that's good! I'm glad." But she hardly managed to look it. And then she added, "A—a fortnight! I don't know *what* you'll say, Sandy."

"Say?" he asked. "Look here, if you think I'm going to scold you if things have got into a bit of a mess, you're altogether wrong, my child. I know I've been a beastly bear with a sore head at home, but I'm not so unreasonable as all that."

"They—they haven't—got in a mess," said Vickie. "Only you'll see when you come home. I hope you'll like the things I've done. You know there were lots of things I wanted you to do before you were hurt, and you wouldn't listen."

Sandy said in a level sort of voice, "What have you done?"

"Well, it's *paid,* anyhow," said Vickie defiantly. I always jolly well knew I could make Bentley pay."

"What have you done?" he asked again.

"Well, I couldn't argue about things when you told me what you wanted done, because you were ill, and the doctor told me you mustn't be worried about home things, and besides it was all settled then about the twenty-acre field."

"The twenty-acre field?" This was Bentley's best ground.

"Yes. You know you got about nothing out of the wheat last year, although it was a fine crop. Well, some Dutch onion growers are buying and renting ground all about Bedfordshire where they can get it. They've bought a lot about Bentley way, of course—it's better than our way for onions of course, but I just about knew our ole twenty-acre field would grow onions. I s'think it's been cultivated since Noah came out of the ark, ain't it?"

"Well?"

"Well, I wrote to them and asked them to come to Bentley and look, and they did, and took it——"

"You've sold it?"

"No, I couldn't sign the deeds. I went to a lawyer to see if I could because you were knocked out, but he said, 'No,' and I wanted him to let Mother then, and he said, 'No.' So I've let it them for three years with the first option to buy if the field goes in the market. Sandy, they paid me fifty shillings an acre, and they put the money down!"

"That was very good indeed," Sandy said. "They didn't pay for the three years?"

"No, no, oney for one. Are you pleased, Sandy?"

"I think you've done very well."

"Oh, do you really? I was so afraid you'd put yourself out. But it will be all right for you to let them buy that field at the end of three years because—— You know you always said them two onion

meadows couldn't be cleaned? Well, I know they can. I've had them plowed, and by the time they've been cross-plowed, and the frosts split the clots, and the sun's baked the bulbs, and the ground's been kept moving a year, so the seeds can't grow, it'll be clean, I bet what you like. And we can put in beans—the first year, so as to get the hoe among the plants, and to hand weed them, and by the time three years have gone it'll be fit for anything, that land, and no muck needed for four or five years. There's one twelve acres and the other nine, ain't there? Well, you can easy let the twenty-acre field go, can't you? And it'll be far better for the Low Meadows not to have seeds from them wretched little strong onions brought into the pasture by the ole birds, same as they do now."

"I see," said Sandy. "It will need at least an extra man to keep that ground moving."

"No, it won't. I've had a runnel dug from the pond to the yard, and a trough put in. It oney cost six pound ten, galvanized iron tank, and it's worth very near an extra man, with the pumping it saves. And I've had a trap put at the pond, so you can stop the water when you've a mind, and easy clean the tank out. I've given Bill Geeves the sack. He was milking with mucky hands, and I ticked him off, and he told me he wasn't going to take his orders from a bit of a girl, so I told him he needn't come for his wages to a bit of girl either. He come for his money Saturday, and I told him to go on home, and told him he could talk to you, if he liked, when you come out of hospital, and see if you liked mucky milk any better than

I did. So he puddled off. I've got young Jimmy Medlock in his place."

"You're a wonderful child, Vickie. Anything else?"

"I've had to be up with the lambs pretty well every night myself. That's why I didn't get in to see you. Charlie got the flu, and then he got pneumonia, and I had to get ole George Bates to come and sit up with me. It's been wet, you know, but we oney lost three lambs—believe one of them was born dead, too."

"Well done, both of you!"

"And I've bought six good pigs from Mr. Larkins. I always did think it was silly we hadn't any pigs, and those good sties doing nothing but hold a bit of meal and the roots from the garden. I've thought so more since we lost so many orders, and didn't sell so much milk. So Bessie makes cream cheeses now, and the skim-milk feeds the ole pigs. They ain't half coming on, I tell you! And I've London orders for all the cream cheeses we can make. Of course it would be a loss on *them* oney for the skim-milk. We shall get it back all right when we sell the pigs. We shall that."

"You're a very clever girl, Vickie," he said. "I congratulate you. Could you get any money out of the bank for wages, or——"

"No. You see, Allport paid his bills, and then there was the money for the twenty-acre field——"

They talked more and more about the farm, Vickie doing all the telling. At last she rose to go. Bentley was a long way off, and it looked as though fog were coming down.

CHAPTER XXIX

SANDY was not needed at Bentley, they were doing better without him. He was not indispensable to Bentley, and——

He stopped there. Could he face it? Could he frame the thought to end that sentence?

In boldness and bitterness he faced it. He never had been, in the whole of his sacrificed life, indispensable. Lucy and John Dalhousie were right. "Some one always turns up to carry on."

It was true. Vickie had turned up now. Whoever would have thought that a child like that could have stepped into the breach—a girl of under twenty—Vickie! And in just the same way, if he had left Bentley at any other time some one would have turned up to carry on.

He need never have been tied to Bentley. He could have been a vet or a doctor, he could have married Helen Brandon, he could have joined the army like a decent citizen. He thought he might just as well have done it.

Sadder things, but never a thing so bitter had ever happened to Sandy. He had given his life, his love, his honor, for nothing—not even for a decent death. He had done nothing but be a fool.

As he had said the night before, "I am needed," so now he tried to say, "It's all been for nothing." But

the words reached no goal. The ways of Providence became once more inscrutable.

Well, at last he was free from Bentley. He need not go back there. He could start life over again.

Never go back? Never again to live near Maurry's garden, never to sit in the fire-warmed kitchen opposite his mother, never to hear her voice or feel her hand, or have her depend on him for anything? Never to tramp over the straw-strewn yard at Bentley, never to see again the cows come up at milking time from the Low Meadows, never to see the sun set over Bentley's barns? Never to go again to Maurry's room, never to see again the old gate by the Low Meadows, never to plan again how Bentley should be cropped—to hand over Bentley and all its people to some one else's care, to leave Bentley?

Bentley did not need him any more. Bentley never had needed him.

"You don't know what it feels like when no one needs you."—"No I don't know how that feels."—"You can't get much lower."—"I expect you can't."—"When I was bad it seemed as if it was so important to get better, and now I wish I hadn't."

The old man whom no one needed had gone out that morning, and in a fortnight Sandy too would go out—unneeded.

"When I was bad it seemed as if it was so important to get better, and now I wish I hadn't."

Why had he not been killed with George? It felt to Sandy frightfully unkind that he had not been killed

with George. The deep lines in his face, that for the last month or so had not appeared to be so very deep after all, grew deep again. Lucy was coming, and he wished that she was not. The old habit of silence settled down on him.

What a hopeless fool he had been all his life through! Why had he not done what others did, and gone for what he wanted? Oh, the folly of it, the folly of it.

Lucy came. She sat down by his bed and talked, and he managed to talk to her hiding his hurt. But she wanted to know a great deal: for instance—had the doctor examined him, and when was he going home? Oh, and Vickie had been, had she? What was good with Vickie?

The old habit of silence gave way to the new habit of telling Lucy. He told her how well Vickie had done, and he did not stint his praise of his young sister. Lucy listened but, strangely, did not smile. The same expression was in her dark eye as had been there on an occasion when she had told him that one of her little children had fallen and been badly hurt. The more cheerfully he talked the deeper the expression grew in Lucy's eyes.

"So you see," he said, "you and John were quite right. I'm not indispensable to Bentley, and I never have been."

She did not answer that. She said, "Sandy, I've been so sorry I worried you about your creed last night. I was abominable. I ought to have known it."

He said, "You couldn't—possibly."

"Oh, couldn't I?" she said. "Look, Sandy there are some of us who don't say creeds because we haven't got them, or because we daren't, and there are some of us who are very keen about them, like the man who said, 'I go, sir,' in the parable, when his father told him to go and work on his farm, and we're very keen on saying it right, and some of us—oh, some of us—just go, Sandy dear."

"Oh, Lucy, for pity's sake!" he exclaimed. "You—you don't know how badly I've done. You don't know how bad-tempered I've been about it. I've hated Bentley and all that belongs to it. You can't call that—going—can you?"

She said, "You've never hated Bentley."

"Oh, haven't I!"

"No," she said, "never. You've hated feeling that you had no choice, though as a matter of fact I think you've always chosen—just to do the decent thing. But, Sandy, look—you love Bentley so much you're being torn to bits because you've found out you're not indispensable to it."

He began to contradict her. "Oh, I——"

She spoke very gently. "Isn't it enough just to be very useful? Must one be indispensable?"

He said, "Why, no, of course—one shouldn't be—indispensable——"

He hardly realized that he had Lucy's hand gripped tight in his, and he lay for a long time silent. He was drinking in a new revelation of Bentley—a Bentley

that was quite new; a place in which one was useful, not indispensable, but very useful, a place of liberty and large fulfilment, the job he loved.

He drank it in, drank it in, and here was joy for ever; for love's *first* miracle had happened—the water of Bentley's drudgery had turned into good wine.

THE END

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